Subjectivity, Immediacy, and the Digital:
Historical Reassessment in Contemporary American Cinema

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My sisters, Amy and Chloe, my brother-in-law Ben, and my little nephew Milo, for providing love, support and welcome distractions.

Finally, I wish to dedicate my thesis to four people, without whom the experience would have been nigh-on impossible, and far less enjoyable:

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Declaration

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It has been composed by myself and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree.

Material from Chapters One, Two and Three of this thesis has been published as an article in the academic publication *Networking Knowledge* 5:3 (2012), titled 'Digital Lives: Refiguring the recent and distant pasts in new biographical forms'. Similarly, material from Chapter Two has been published in *Scope: An Online Journal of Film and Television Studies* 26 (2014) in an article titled '"We ain't thinking about tomorrow": Narrative Immediacy and the Digital Period Aesthetic in Michael Mann's *Public Enemies*'. Material from Chapters One and Two has been published in the edited collection *Cinema, Television & History: New Approaches* (ed. Laura Mee & Johnny Walker, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014) in a chapter titled 'Historical Subjectivity and Film Style: Re-enactment and Digital Technologies in Contemporary Historical Cinema', pp. 260-280.

Abstract

This thesis investigates various forms of historical reassessment in contemporary American cinema (2005-2013), with a particular emphasis on the role that digital technologies play in re-framing, re-negotiating, and re-vivifying historical figures and events. The focus of this work concerns questions relating to cinema's relationship with history, and how this has been achieved through changing narratives and film aesthetics. It uses critical analysis to propose that a new range of practices and tools have been utilised to address and challenge conventions of specific historical genres, such as the historical epic, the gangster film, and the biopic. The complex and ambiguous notions of historical narrative and experience, together with continued discourses concerning representation, verisimilitude and accountability, make recent historical cinema particularly suitable for demonstrating this.

The Review of Literature addresses three major areas through which this thesis has been conceived and conducted: historiography, historical cinema, and film technologies. It considers a broad range of literature in order to acknowledge some of the wider contexts that will be employed in the discussion of the historical film, and establishes the more specific conditions under which my analysis takes place.

The main section of the thesis is divided into three chapters, each of which examining a particular sub-genre of the historical film. Chapter One introduces some of the key issues surrounding historical cinema, discussing the conventions of the historical epic in order to frame our understanding of issues of spectacularity and subjectivity in the genre. I use *The New World* and *Che* as case studies to examine the differing practical, aesthetic and narrative approaches to the historical epic, considering the implication of technology in terms of style, approach and implication.

Chapter Two deals with the gangster film, using *Public Enemies* to consider issues of immediacy and immersion within the genre. I also compare modern iterations of the gangster film with its classical, revisionist and retro antecedents, making extensive comparisons with *Bonnie and Clyde*. Similarly, in my study of the biographical film in Chapter Three, I use *Citizen Kane* as a contrast to the modern form of the "unconventional" biopic embodied by *The Social Network*. This genre is considered in light of its aesthetic approaches, generic deviations and developments, the public-private dynamic, and the notion of the American Dream.

The thesis concludes with an overview of the aesthetic and narrative approaches studied in this work, and draws attention to the contemporary shift in filmmaking practices and technologies. Given the isolated period of study, I propose ways in which the study could be extended in generic, transmedial and methodological terms, as well as acknowledging the importance of the historical film at the levels of expression, representation, and discourse.

Introduction

Historical reassessment: attitudes, assumptions, methodologies

In this thesis I explore the way historical narratives can be shaped by a range of technological and stylistic elements, and how this impacts on the way in which the past is related. Using detailed textual analysis over a range of films, I aim to disclose how the historical past is re-created, re-enacted, and re-visioned through particular aesthetic and representational strategies. These include narrative, editing, cinematography, lighting, and sound design, elements that communicate historical messages and convey various historical interpretations. The films I have selected for analysis are recent productions that illuminate this relationship between history and its reconstruction, focusing on contemporary examples of the historical epic (The New World, 2005, and *Che*, 2008), the gangster film (*Public Enemies*, 2009), and the biographical film (*The Social Network*, 2010). Together, these films indicate that we have entered into a specific era of historical cinema in which the large-scale transition from celluloid-based production practices to digital ones has taken place.

In the following pages I argue that new modes of the filmic writing of history have flourished in American cinema over the last decade. Rather than forcing modern historical films into a particular set of guiding principles, this thesis aims to construct a critical, aesthetic and technological understanding of this cycle and its engagement with traditional and revisionist historical discourses, as well as its relation to views of popular history and the role of the historian. I have focused my attention on this period in order to examine the changing practices and attitudes of filmmakers to both traditional and contemporary modes of historical representation. This work not only

covers a very recent and significant film cycle that is crucial to modern historical discourse, but it also calls for a fundamental revision in the way that we consider both the historical nature of films and the impact of new technologies and methodologies.

This work is borne out of an interest in the wide-ranging genre of the historical film and a fascination with how filmic technologies are deployed within specific genres for aesthetic, experiential or affective impact. My aim is to extend and develop the understanding of what can be expressed within the conventions of the genre by examining the techniques and aesthetics that have resulted from formal experimentation and technological implementation. The intention of this study is not to provide definitive answers about the representation of the past or the use of specific technologies, but to raise and investigate issues that relate to the wider aesthetic and epistemic systems of modern historical cinema. My focus on these aspects functions as a way of opening up new interpretations of the genre, while also encouraging a new way of studying the developments of the historical film.

The case studies I discuss in this thesis were released between 2005 and 2010, with these years bracketing the major shift towards digital production, distribution and exhibition strategies.[1] These texts signify a series of changes in terms of how historical figures and events are represented, and thus exhibit a range of features characteristic

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[1] Between 2006 and 2012, the number of digital cinema screens rose from approximately 400 to over 36,000 worldwide. Roughly 95% of theatres in America and the UK have, as of 2013, been converted to digital, with all screens worldwide expected to follow by the end of 2015. See David Hancock, 'Digital Screen Numbers and Forecasts to 2015 Are Finalised', *iSuppli* [Online], 26 January 2011 (available at: http://www.isuppli.com/media-research/marketwatch/pages/digital-screen-numbers-and-forecasts-to-2015-are-finalised.aspx, accessed 07/10/13), and Neal Romanek, 'Inaugural UK Digital Cinema conference assesses the state of digital cinema', *Screen Daily* [Online], 07 February 2013 (available at: http://www.screendaily.com/news/inaugural-uk-digital-cinema-conference-assesses-the-state-of-digital-cinema/5051676.article?blocktitle=ScreenTech&contentID=283, accessed 07/10/13).

of a new historical cinema. It must be acknowledged, of course, that the historical film has formed a significant part of Hollywood production since the silent era, encompassing many genres; as Mikhail Bakhtin writes, genres serve as "organs of memory" for particular cultures, and both "remember the past and make their resources available to the present.[2] Recent forms of historical representation signal a resurgence of historical consciousness in a period marked by heightened national and cultural discourse relating to both the past and the present.[3] Among several questions considered here is the link between historical representation and production practices relating to digital technologies. The contemporary historical film represents, in its subject matter and narrative forms, a range of cultural expressions and national mythologies. This encourages us to read these forms within broader filmmaking contexts across cultural, ethnic, and geographic boundaries. This range of contemporary films represents a dynamic array of historical representations of figures, giving some sense of the experience of history, not just the look of the past but its sensation too.

In a study of the British costume drama, Sue Harper establishes an interest in cinematic historiography that expands the generic framework to encompass films which invoke "the mythical and symbolic aspects of the past as a means of providing pleasure, rather than instruction."[4] This attitude suggests that other films set in the

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[2] See Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of Prosaics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 278-297.

[3] In addition to the contested historical and geopolitical aspects of even more recent films such as *Lincoln* (2012) and *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012) discussed in the Conclusion, think also of the larger critical discourses surrounding such (Western) events as 9/11, the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the 2008 financial meltdown and ongoing crisis that relate to issues of trauma and national identity.

[4] Sue Harper, 'Bonnie Prince Charlie Revisited: British Costume Film in the 1950s', in Robert Murphy (ed.), *The British Cinema Book* (London: BFI, 1997), p. 133.

past are worthy of investigation, including those not usually thought of or theorised as historical. Also focusing on the period rather than the historical film, Belén Vidal remarks on David Lowenthal's statement that "it is no longer the presence of the past that speaks to us, but its pastness,"[5] claiming this subtle distinction "underlies the pleasures of the period film, in which 'the Past' (as original myth or foundational moment) resonates in the present through the visual (and aural) spectacle of pastness, and its intricate signs."[6] Period films encompass both historical films and classic adaptations, and within these categories lie a wide variety of genre works (epics, romances, thrillers, comedies). This liberal attitude comes into conflict with more established assumptions, such as Pierre Sorlin's decree that "the expression 'historical film' should be restricted to movies which purposefully aim at depicting, as accurately as possible, a past period,"[7] and Robert Brent Toplin's suggestion of consigning to "the waste heap" any film that would "simplify history, trivialize it, or bend it to shape the needs of the artist."[8] Yet, as David Eldridge points out, this totalising dismissal of so many historical texts is not just unproductive but counterproductive, and this huge volume of material can reveal a great deal about the historical understanding of filmmakers and the cultural value of historical expression.[9]

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[5] David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. xvii.

[6] Belén Vidal, *Figuring the Past: Period Film and the Mannerist Aesthetic* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), p. 9. Regarding the reconstructed images of the period film, Vidal notes that "a specific aesthetic takes shape through the film's absorption (or 'cannibalisation') of literary, painterly and photographic references, which have their own genealogy of representations in film history" (ibid., p. 10).

[7] Pierre Sorlin, 'Historical Films as Tools for Historians', in John E. O'Connor (ed.), *Image as Artifact: The Historical Analysis of Film and Television* (Malabar: Krieger, 1990), p. 43.

[8] Robert Brent Toplin, 'The Historian and Film: A Research Agenda', *Journal of American History* 78:3 (December 1991), p. 1162.

[9] David Eldridge, *Hollywood's History Films* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), p. 4. Eldridge actively enforces this stance in his reading of *Some Like It Hot* (1959) as a historical film, albeit one that should not be taken (and does not take itself) seriously. See Eldridge, '*Some Like It Hot* and the Virtues of Not Taking History Too Seriously', in J.E. Smyth (ed.), *Hollywood and the American Historical Film*, pp. 94-119.

The historical film has traditionally been subdivided into different trends, cycles and sub-genres, and the grouping of films I discuss is primarily based on their period of production. In this study of historical reassessment, however, it is necessary to refer back to earlier periods in order to encompass the broad indicators, differences, and continuities of other historical approaches. Classical or conventional historical films can be considered to be those that secure or reaffirm dominant ideologies; more recent films display a level of both formal and narratological invention, creating subversive texts that often challenge lines of traditional thought.[10] On many levels, this form of historical reassessment is reminiscent of the revisionism evident in many genres in the 1960s and '70s which unsettled and undermined culturally dominant representations of America. In order to consider the contemporary cycle of historical cinema, it is necessary to examine and draw comparisons with historical films made during the studio era. It is no coincidence that this is where the majority of the criticism and formal study has been situated. However, by balancing the technological influences with contemporary thematic, cultural and ideological concerns, this study examines how films have come to foreground the inherent complexities of historical thought and representation, often calling into question existing knowledge and asking audiences to analyse and interpret these representations. The discrepancies between different ways of theorising the genre suggest the presence of ongoing and overlapping processes, and these developments form the main subject of this study. Although it is tempting to attribute these changes in historical perception and

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[10] Particular historical events occupy privileged positions in the meta-narrative of American history; others do not. Films that deal with the recent past may often be presenting and contextualising these events for the first time in this manner, in contrast to films that focus on familiar events of the distant pasts, where filmmakers represent particular incidents in order to shed new light on these events or place them in different contexts. In other words, there are new freedoms and constraints involved when depicting recent events, resulting in new critical discourses concerning accuracy, verisimilitude and historical realism.

representation to ongoing debates regarding historical relativism, myth, and nostalgia in an age of austerity, uncertainty, and national self-reflection, these explanations simply prove to be contextual. Instead, I foreground the continuities that exist between this cycle of films and other forms of classical and revisionist representation in historical and generic terms.

Although my analysis of the ways in which contemporary historical films represent and communicate events and characters from the past depends on the conventions and traditions of specific genres, I have attempted to relate them to larger issues of representation and interpretation. My choice of films does not constitute every aspect of historical cinema, but serves as a sampling of significant sub-modes. The term "historical film" is capacious enough to accommodate the multiple generic manifestations of the category, such as the epic, the gangster film, and the biopic.[11] Thus, the films I examine offer several different perspectives on the development of the genre. The case studies embody particular forms of historical expression, from issues of subjectivity and objectivity to evoking period imagery and iconography; from using technology to enhance the immediacy of the past to conveying extremely recent historical events. J.E. Smyth sees diversity as key to the richness of the genre: "historical filmmaking—regardless of whether the topic is American, African, European, or Asian history—is transgeneric."[12] The analyses in this thesis demonstrate how we can be alert to the aesthetic, narrational and thematic construction of historical narratives—both filmic and digital, overt and barely perceptible—and

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[11] These are, in a way, gendered genres where the feminine is an absent presence, unlike the period film which, as Vidal points out, stimulates ubiquitous discourse around "gender and cultural production (female authorship), representation (cultural histories) and reception (period film as a 'feminine genre')." See Vidal, *Figuring the Past*, p. 24.

[12] Smyth, *Hollywood and the American Historical Film*, p. xviii.

investigate the meanings and effects of these strategies. Given what is so often overlooked or assumed, it is important not to neglect the visual elements that make up a historical film, with the strength and immediacy of the image often having equal or greater significance than its content.[13] An aesthetic study—together with an examination of the technologies used to create and shape these aesthetics—merits an equal level of attention.

While some may object to the prominence granted to both text and producer, recent historical discourse has defended claims for films as visual history and filmmakers as historians. As Toplin observes, "Filmmakers do not consult a respected guidebook that lists successful strategies for the design of cinematic history […] Individual artists stamp their personalities on their projects."[14] My interest here is in how modern technologies have impacted on historical cinema, moving beyond computer-generated imagery (CGI) to consider how filmmakers have used digital systems as storytelling tools that depict and create histories in new ways. This study is a comparative historiography that examines both historical discourse and modern filmmaking practices. As discussed later, there are historical films made since 2010 that are of potential value to this study in terms of perpetuating or developing the trends identified in this thesis. However, due to limitations of space, they cannot be

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[13] Regarding an aesthetic study of the historical film, Vivian C. Sobchack notes in her examination of the visual style of *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) that this approach is traditionally underused due to "the myopia demanded by focused and limited critical discourse," such as adaptation criticism and cultural or social approaches. See Sobchack, '*The Grapes of Wrath* (1940): Thematic Emphasis through Visual Style' in Peter C. Rollins (ed.), *Hollywood as Historian: American Film in a Cultural Context* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983), p. 68.

[14] Robert Brent Toplin, *Reel History: In Defense of Hollywood* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), pp. 14-15.

considered in depth. They will, I am sure, provide a framework for an examination of contemporary historical cinema in the future.

History, historiography and historical cinema are all complex, multivalent concepts, undefinable in any single set of terms. By retaining a degree of flexibility concerning their usage and definition it is possible to convey the range of approaches and expressions. I will establish an extensive context for my understanding of these issues, together with those surrounding film technologies, in my Review of Literature. I will also situate my own methodology in relation to other critical perspectives of the genre. Together, my case studies form a diverse body of work of film historiography ranging from the discovery of America to Depression-era gangsterism and modern technological business culture.

Chapter One looks at historical representation and film style, supported by detailed examination of *Che* and *The New World*. Reading the contemporary historical film alongside the work of Paul Ricœur, Robert Rosenstone, and Robert Burgoyne, I draw attention to the ways in which subjective and objective perspectives of the past can be related to filmmaking technologies. Analysing the importance of non-linear editing and digital production, in addition to particular forms of historical re-enactment, I demonstrate how historical agency reconstructs the experience of past events. The discursive breadth of the epic enables me to begin with a wide-ranging discussion of historical cinema, raising a series of issues that will be addressed in subsequent chapters.

The complex relations between history and mythology are addressed more specifically in Chapter Two. Uniting previous considerations of technology and mythology, this chapter examines the gangster film by concentrating on the depiction of John Dillinger in *Public Enemies*. This chapter examines the impact of digital aesthetics on historical cinema in its desire to convey the immediacy of past events. In particular, the film's style allows us to isolate a set of changes and contradictions that are not always easy to identify during phases of technological change. The chapter uses *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) in order to analyse the way in which gangster films of the revisionist cycle utilised existing conventions to create new ideological and cultural forms as part of their reconsideration of particular generic codes. I conclude by using this contrast to provide an illustration of the sense of moral engagement and reassessment that historical texts can provoke.

In Chapter Three I turn my attention to the biographical film. *The Social Network* acts as a superlative case study for exploring modern forms of the biopic which focus on unconventional figures and depict events from the recent past. I start by examining the film's visual style and use of digital in creating the film's "internet aesthetic", thus conveying its thematic links to social media and recent technological developments. I go on to discuss how the film conforms to and deviates from established generic tropes. In my analysis of "unconventional" biopics, *Citizen Kane* (1941) operates as a useful comparison. Finally, I consider the film's public-private dynamic, namely the ways in which notions of money, business and the American Dream are related and expressed. I conclude by considering how *The Social Network* relates to concepts of

celebrity, memory and technological nostalgia, interrogating how filmmakers and viewers are able to engage with very recent history.

Unlike Trevor McCrisken and Andrew Pepper's position in *American History and Contemporary Hollywood Film*, I do not presume to pass judgment on what constitutes "good history" on film or question their viability as pedagogical tools,[15] nor am I concerned with anachronisms or factual errors in costuming, settings or mise-en-scène. Instead, I consider how film's engagement with history has been shaped by production conditions and the technologies with which filmmakers construct their narratives. The case studies upon which my arguments are predicated share a common trait in that they focus not on privileged, familiar historical events or benign, hallowed figures of the past. Instead, they demonstrate an interest in the peripheral, enigmatic characters who, while remaining both recognised and relevant, have rarely been thought of as "historical". Although figures such as Pocahontas and John Dillinger have frequently been realised on screen, their characters have been shrouded in myth and positioned within other, ahistorical generic frameworks that choose not to acknowledge their historical significance. Other individuals, such as Mark Zuckerberg, are not thought of as historical because they are still living, and it is therefore impossible to offer a conclusive verdict on their actions or significances.

Contemporary historical cinema has incorporated a wide range of aesthetic interventions, some through digital means, others through practical, filmic effects. When framed by the specific contexts of the historical film, these technologies and

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[15] Trevor McCrisken and Andrew Pepper, *American History and Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005)*,* pp. 1-12.

techniques can be identified as encouraging new ways of producing meaning and conveying subjective experiences of the past. The analytical methodology of this thesis is an attempt to deal with how we can read the different range of approaches enabled by new technologies and artistic impulses, and to quantify their impact on the meanings generated by these texts relating to the depiction of historical experiences. Simply put, do these films demonstrate enhanced engagements with the past or merely alternate ways of realising it?

Review of Literature

I have previously mentioned several key theorists and historians who have played an integral role in how historical cinema is studied and understood, such as Robert Rosenstone and Robert Burgoyne, but before embarking on this study it is necessary to consider a variety of other positions and related subject areas. This review of literature centres around three distinct areas of critical thinking that have a strong bearing on the development of my thesis: historiography, historical cinema, and film technologies. It deals with these three areas systematically in order to provide a framework from which I can investigate and evaluate how the relationship between history, cinema, and audiences has developed in recent years. While this thesis also considers issues of genre, these will be dealt with in individual chapters. Understanding how the formative processes of these associations is important, as is the complexity of historical representation and comprehension wherein technology, industry and ideology play vital and often conflicting roles. The review will start by considering issues from the field of historiography that influence the ways in which we can read and understand the historical film, before considering how debates between film and history have previously been conceptualised. It will conclude by focusing on issues relating to film technology, such as image capture, questions of ontology, and debates concerning digital cinema. This section will lay the groundwork for my later examination of the role that digital technologies have played in the contemporary historical film.

Historiography

The methodology and development of the discipline of history impacts on all forms of historical study, and historical cinema should not be excepted. Historians such as E.H. Carr, Keith Jenkins and Hayden White have produced a series of seminal texts, and I intend to consider some of their principal works here in order to elucidate three key historical concepts: truth, perspective, and narrativisation.

In *What Is History?*, E.H. Carr steers a middle course between empiricist and idealist historical positions, setting out a series of historiographical principles rejecting traditional historical methods and practices. This collection of lectures raises questions of objectivity as a way of grappling with history's theoretical problems. Carr points out that it is important to understand the philosophy behind history because its meaning is not always implicit or self-evident.[16] Refuting his earlier statement that "[o]bjective history does not exist,"[17] he argues that historians can theoretically be "objective"—or at least achieve a partial approximation of objective truth—if they are capable of moving beyond the narrow bias of situations both past and present, and can thus form historical works capable of contributing to societal progress. In the first lecture, 'The Historian and His Facts', Carr claims:

> The historian is necessarily selective. The belief in a hard core of historical facts existing objectively and independently of the interpretation of the historian is a preposterous fallacy, but one which it is very hard to eradicate.[18]

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[16] This is a subject that Keith Jenkins further elucidates in *Re-thinking History* (London: Routledge, 1991).

[17] Published in the first volume of Carr's *History of Soviet Russia: The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923* (London: Macmillan, 1950). Taken from 'Introduction' to E.H. Carr, *What Is History?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001). Originally published by the Cambridge University Press in 1961.

[18] Ibid., p. 6.

The historian, as the author of a historical narrative, is not merely a passive and detached observer nor a mediator of historical facts, but an active interpreter of events.[19] Carr maintains that, due to the vast quantity of information in the modern era, the historian must always pick and choose which "facts" will be used for a particular interpretation. His famous example that "millions of other people" had crossed the Rubicon before Julius Caesar did so in 49 BC demonstrates the subjectivity and selective process of the historian in finding historical significance in one particular event.[20] For Carr, this shows how facts can be divided into "facts of the past" (those deemed unimportant by historians) and "historical facts" (those demonstrated as having greater significance).[21] The example of Caesar and the Rubicon contends that historians are arbitrarily able to determine which details of the past are transformed historical facts, and these ascribed significances are recorded in historical texts.[22]

Carr's view does not merely propose that all history is interpretation, nor that facts do not exist;[23] he contends that "facts and documents are essential to the historian," but "[t]hey do not by themselves constitute history,"[24] recognising the important distinction between the historian's selection of facts and the author's original thoughts

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[19] It is also important to note, as Carr does with reference to R.G. Collingwood's *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994; originally published by the Oxford University Press in 1946), that historical facts themselves are not "pure" and do not come to the interpreter in this fashion as they are always refracted through the mind of the recorder, another active member in the transmission of the past to the present (Carr, *What Is History?*, p. 16).

[20] Ibid., pp. 5-6.

[21] Ibid., p. 6.

[22] This is further explicated by Carr's use of the example of a riot that took place at Stalybridge Wake in 1850, a fact of the past that had recently been raised by being cited in the lectures of Dr Kitson Clark. Though this does not immediately "transform" it into historical fact, it does propose its ability to do so, and Carr concludes that its future depends on whether "this incident is accepted by other historians as valid and significant" (ibid., p. 7).

[23] Carr goes on to reject the relativist view of history, for instance, and Jenkins notes that he "begins […] to reinstate 'the facts' in rather unproblematical ways himself, ways eventually leading him towards his own version of objectivity, truth and so on." See Keith Jenkins, *On 'What is History?': From Carr and Elton to Rorty and White* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 47.

[24] Carr, *What Is History?*, p. 13.

or intentions. This is crucial when dealing with secondary documents such as films based around historical figures, both in evaluating the role of those who produce these texts and also in considering the academic and critical accounts of those who analyse and question their historical accuracy and validity. In his polemic, *Rethinking History*, Jenkins insists on a reassessment of historical fact, coming to the understanding that it is "only a description of things that have happened and which, therefore, cannot have an intrinsic meaning (facts never speak for themselves)."[25] For Jenkins, the logic of history is not something to be discovered but to be constructed, "building on referentiality but deploying figurative thinking, argument, theory, concept and ethics."[26] There is no hidden or true story to be discovered, rather the-past-as-history, a representation of the past through the form given to its reality. If history does not function as an exercise in reconstruction then it is important to acknowledge the epistemological options open to us as there is no correct route or methodology for reaching the past.

Carr's notion of objectivity and historical truth rests on picking out the significant from the insignificant, a process problematised by future perspectives: "For simply change what the future ought to be," Jenkins writes, "and you change the perspective from which you read the past; shift the end point of the narrative slightly, and you change the criterion for significance."[27] The position from where history is viewed is therefore important to the understanding of that past, relative to previous and future

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[25] Jenkins, *Rethinking History*, p. xiii. *Re-thinking History* poses central questions as to how we can cope with and comprehend the past, and has proved highly influential in forcing historians to re-think their empirical attitudes to history and pay attention to the role that language plays in the creation of it.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Jenkins, *On 'What is History?'*, p. 60. Jenkins also notes in his introduction that all histories (including postmodern ones) are future-orientated.

perspectives. Regarding historical cinema, we must consider filmmakers (particularly screenwriters, directors, and actors) as active interpreters of past events, selecting which facts, figures and details to include/exclude. It is also important to consider how these filmmakers, as creators of historical texts, ascribe meaning and significance to the history they convey, and how these attributes vary and differ from previous representations, producing a reassessment of historical events. While some may see changing representations of history in cinema as revisionism, a subject that Robert Rosenstone discusses at length, I find the term "reassessment" to be more exacting in its scope, considering that film is not a purely visual pleasure and new appraisals and evaluations are formed through these depictions.[28] If, as Carr concludes, history is "an unending dialogue between the present and the past,"[29] then forms of reassessment—in this continuous process of interaction—which incorporate different factual and historical materials may cause both the producer (the historian) and the consumer (the reader/viewer) to change their views or be open to variable interpretations of figures and events.[30]

These issues of perspective and subjectivity remain integral to personal constructions and interpretations of history. Jenkins' observation that the writing of history is basically but inextricably linked to the context in which it is produced is particularly relevant, for instance, as it is central to understanding the complex relationship

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[28] Carr describes this system of interpretation as "the processing process" (Carr, *What Is History?*, p. 10).

[29] Ibid., p. 24.

[30] Similarly, this level of dialogue occurs between the individual and society, with the historian positioned both as "an individual human being" and "a social phenomenon," approaching the facts of the historical past as "both the product and the conscious or unconscious spokesman of the society to which he belongs" (Carr, *What Is History?*, p. 29). Thus, Carr argues that history is a social process in which historians are engaged as social beings, underlining the reciprocity of interaction between the historian and the facts they interpret.

between the past and the present. Jenkins states, "The past that we 'know' is always contingent upon our view, our own 'present'. Just as we are ourselves products of the past so the known past (history) is an artefact of ours."[31] Our consideration of the past is as much about the present in which the text is produced as it is about the period it covers. However, Jenkins' comment that "through hindsight, we in a way know more about the past than the people who lived in it"[32] should be treated with caution, as our privileged perspective merely allows to think differently and more comprehensively about the past, but is distinct from the actual *experience* of said past.

Jenkins argues that history is a shifting discourse of multiple perspectives. The retrospective view of the past means that historical documents are often taken and positioned out of their original contexts in order to elucidate subjective ideologies. David Lowenthal sees the conflation and exaggeration of aspects of history as inevitable: "Time is foreshortened, details selected and highlighted, actions concentrated, relations simplified, not to deliberately alter […] the events but to […] give them meaning."[33] Lowenthal concludes that histories appear more comprehensible than the past itself may have been because historical narratives avoid the role of ruptures in history and play up the linkages in continuity. Although Jenkins admits his indebtedness to Hayden White, a philosopher of history whose work serves as a valuable overview of his style of "postist" thinking,[34] he doubts White's belief that

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[31] Jenkins, *Re-thinking History*, p. 15.
[32] Ibid.
[33] David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 218.
[34] Postmodern, anti-narrative approaches to history tend to place emphasis on the relativity of truth, recognising it as a contested notion. While writers such as Hayden White, Michel Foucault and Peter Gay stress that no scholar comes "objectively" or "neutrally" before their evidence, Linda Hutcheon welcomes the postmodernist challenge to history's truth claim, "both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs,

we can learn and understand the truth of the past through a detailed knowledge of what happened (i.e. the facts). White believes this "empirical method" allows us to discover our "subject knowledge," constituting the sole way of possessing an "objective knowledge" of history.

White's *The Content of the Form* deals with the problem of the relation between narrative discourse and historical representation. Following E.H. Carr's seminal work, White is one of several historians (and historiographers) who have come to an important realisation:

> [N]arrative is not merely a neutral discursive form that may or may not be used to represent real events in their aspect as developmental processes, but rather entails ontological and epistemic choices with distinct ideological and even specifically political implications.[35]

White is not denying the existence of history, but instead explores the "natural" boundaries between fact and fiction, arguing that there is no unmediated experience of "reality" and that we only learn of historical events through discourse; it was at this stage that history began to be rethought as a human construct.

Concerning the role of causation in history, Carr further contends that, in his deterministic outlook, we must acknowledge the importance of accidents in creating

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and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity" (Linda Hutcheon, *The Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* [New York: Routledge, 1988], p. 93).

[35] Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. ix. White acknowledges that many historians hold narrative discourse as "the very stuff of a mythical view of reality," but he stresses that historical events are invented as they do not arrive whole as data already packaged as "facts" in the documentary record (Ibid.). This is reflected in his use of Roland Barthes' maxim that "*le fait n'a jamais qu'une existence linguistique*/the fact has nothing more than a linguistic existence" as the epigraph to this work. See Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, translated by Annette Lavers (London: Cape, 1972).

history rather than viewing events as "inevitable."[36] In a more provocative manner, White insists that historians refuse to recognise the openness, confusion and uncontrollable nature of the past: they "deprive history of the kind of meaninglessness that alone can goad living human beings to [...] endow their lives with a meaning for which they alone are fully responsible."[37] In his consideration of whether the behaviour of individuals or the action of social forces is the object of enquiry, Carr views the individual as not truly free of the society in which they live, but also believes individuals have some ability to impact on history through their actions.[38] Contrary to the Marxist argument that the individual does not have a role in history, Carr is willing to grant such positions, though asserts that the focus on individuals in a "Great Man" theory of history does a profound disservice to the past: "The desire to postulate individual genius as the creative force in history is characteristic of the primitive stages of historical consciousness."[39] There is a key distinction raised here between biography—the treatment of a person as an individual—and history, in which he is treated as part of a whole; it is the complexity of this dynamic that makes it an inviting issue to evaluate in the case studies that make up this thesis.[40]

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[36] Carr, *What Is History?*, pp. 87-102. Carr adds that this leads to a hierarchy of causes where the relative significances determine one's interpretation, but historians should seek the 'rational' causes of historical occurrences, those that can be generalised and applied to other events to broaden our understanding of the past.

[37] White, *The Content of the Form*, p. 72.

[38] By using the example of the role of the rebel in history, Carr forms a division between individuals who helped to shape the societal forces that formed the history for which they are known (such as Oliver Cromwell and Vladimir Lenin) and those who "rode to greatness on the back of already existing forces" (such as Napoleon and Otto von Bismarck). See Carr, *What Is History?*, pp. 46-49). This is also important when evaluating the "greatness" of the Great Man, and how this is only recognised by succeeding rather than present generations.

[39] Ibid., p. 39.

[40] As a whole, the division between the individual and society is an especially pertinent concept as it can be argued that the cinema largely refutes the causation of history by societal forces, choosing instead to project agency onto the individual. It is the individual, most often the Great Man, who causes rather than merely witnesses events, and this agency of the past allows the individual to write history, to *become* it.

Jenkins views history as a way of recognising the manner in which objects are assigned and situated, separating out "history"—which he defines as "that which has been written/recorded about the past"— from "the past" by identifying history as the narrative representation and mirror of a past reality: "the past and history are not stitched into each other such that only one historical reading of the past is absolutely necessary. The past and history float free of each other, they are ages and miles apart."[41] While historians may not invent the past, they do construct its descriptive categories and the meanings it can be said to have, formulating discourses from particular analytical and methodological tools. This distinction can help to clarify the theoretical framework of history, and Jenkins also considers the consequences that arise from this approach.[42]

The transformation of history into a literature of historical narratives is something that Jenkins feels needs to be acknowledged, as well as the philosophical and epistemological assumptions historians make about how histories are achieved.[43] Historians can ascribe different meaning to the same historical events resulting from their own worldview and personal ideologies; as Jenkins notes, "history is first and foremost a literary narrative *about* the past, a literary composition of the data into *a* narrative where the historian creates *a* meaning *for* the past."[44] For Hayden White, the topic of historical subjectivity is intertwined with that of narrativity, observing that

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[41] Jenkins, *Re-thinking History*, p. 7.

[42] As Jenkins notes, the past "has gone and can only be brought back again by historians in very different media, for example in books, articles, documentaries, etc., not as actual events" (ibid., p. 8). The past is made "meaning-full" by other texts with historiography itself as an intertextual construct, referring to the influence that historians (and media-makers) have on each other.

[43] One misleading philosophical assumption that Jenkins addresses is the manner by which history corresponds with the reality of the past through a knowledge of its content; he forces us to confront this as a fundamental misconception and encourages us to challenge our basic assumptions about the empirical validity of history.

[44] Ibid., p. xii.

the writing of history is inextricably linked to the context of its production, as this affects both form and content of historical works. Examining the role of the social and legal systems in the creation of histories (with specific reference to G.W.F. Hegel's work on the philosophy of history[45]), White concludes that "narrativity, certainly in factual storytelling and probably in fictional storytelling as well, is intimately related to, if not a function of, the impulse to moralize reality,"[46] thus identifying with the social system that has formed this morality.

White believes that traditional historiography (since its invention by Herodotus) features the retelling of collective and individual stories in a narrative form, stating that "the literary aspect of the historical narrative was supposed to inhere solely in certain stylistic embellishments that rendered the account vivid and interesting to the reader rather than in the kind of poetic inventiveness presumed to be the characteristic of the writer of fictional narratives."[47] According to this view, then, historians invent nothing but certain rhetorical flourishes or strokes of poeticism to sustain the reader's interest. White notes that narratives are a particularly effective system of discursive meaning production, once again locating the difference between the past and history that was raised by Carr. While Carr identifies a system in which "facts of the past" are transformed into "historical facts," White focuses on the creation of a historical narrative from these facts of the past. According to White, this

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[45] See G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History,* translated and edited by Robert F. Brown and Peter C. Hodgson (Oxford: Clarenden Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[46] White, *The Content of the Form*, p. 14.

[47] Ibid., p. x. In questioning the nature and value of narrativity, White surmises that "narrative might well be considered a solution to a problem of general human concern, namely, the problem of how to translate knowing into telling," thus allowing us to better understand different cultures (Ibid., p. 1). White doubts the ability of events to "tell themselves," a discourse which derives from Gérard Genette's linguistic study in which he states that the "objectivity of narrative is defined by the absence of all reference to the narrator." See Gérard Genette, 'Boundaries of Narrative, *New Literary History* 8:1 (Autumn 1976), p. 9.

conception allows us to account for narrative discourse as "a cultural fact," and for myths and ideologies based on them to "presuppose the adequacy of stories to the representation of the reality whose meaning they purport to reveal."[48]

If the mythic narrative is under no obligation to keep real and imaginary events distinct from one another then the imposition of the two separate orders of events on the storyteller complicates matters somewhat: "Narrative becomes a problem only when we wish to give to real events the form of story. It is because real events do not offer themselves as stories that their narrativization is so difficult."[49] White encourages the historian to consider the epistemic implications of these histories, questioning the insight that narrative can offer into the nature of real events. He also raises a crucial notion in the conception of historical reality, that "the true" is identified with "the real" only when the quality of narrativity can be demonstrated. In distinguishing between historiography and narrative, White separates story elements from plot elements in the historical discourse, but it is the ordering of a narrative from historical accounts that makes them "questionable as to their authenticity and susceptible to being considered as tokens of reality."[50] This relates to how cinema narrativises history, resulting in a conflation or separation of the realms of truth and reality. For my purposes, White's belief that a given history tends to embed a whole set of stories which create a singular comprehensive or archetypal form for the reader is also important, with historians acting as "culturally resonant" storytellers. In order to tell a

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[48] White, *The Content of the Form*, p. x.
[49] Ibid., p. 4. However, although historical accounts vary in their form, White believes they must honour the chronological framework of the original occurrence of events as well as being narrated: "revealed as possessing a structure, an order of meaning, that they do not possess as mere sequence" (ibid., p. 5). White here compares narrative forms of historical writing to non-narrative forms, namely annals and chronicles, treating them as forms of historical representation rather than imperfect histories.
[50] Ibid., p. 20.

history that can be understood by the culture in which they live, historians have to encode these stories in recognisable cultural forms.

In the appendix to *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes distinguishes between progressive and reactionary, liberating and oppressive, ideologies rather than opposing science to ideology itself. In 'The Discourse of History' he argues that history can be represented through different modes that vary in their "mythological" aspects, and challenges the distinction between "historical" and "fictional" discourse by focusing on historiography that favours narrative representations of past events and processes. Barthes claims to demonstrate that historical studies remained a victim of "the fallacy of referentiality," with historical discourse being "essentially an ideological elaboration, or to be more specific, an *imaginary* elaboration,"[51] in that it is performative in nature. For Barthes, the notion that narrative structure has become, in traditional historiography, "both sign and proof of reality"[52] is paradoxical, and narrative is merely an instrument for fashioning a "subjectivity" bearing the "responsibilities" of an "object" in all its forms. This situation defines what Barthes calls the *reality effect*, in that historical discourse merely signifies the real rather than following it, "constantly repeating *this happened*,"[53] and concludes that the effacement of narration implies "a veritable ideological transformation."[54]

The idea of re-working the chronology of history involves the imposition of an alternate non-linear timeframe in which, once again, events are assigned different

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[51] Roland Barthes, 'The Discourse of History' in *The Rustle of Language*, translated by Richard Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 138.
[52] Ibid., p. 140.
[53] Ibid., p. 139.
[54] Ibid., p. 140.

levels of significance according to the historian's design. This de-lineation allows for both the deconstruction (demythologisation, demystification, dehistoricisation) and reconstruction (revisionism, historical reassessment) of historical narratives, issues which are central to this thesis. Historians suggest to readers that some forms of ideas and actions are more legitimate than others; White states elsewhere that the historian "remains unaware of the extent to which his very language determines not only the manner, but also the matter and meaning of his discourse."[55] Barthes confirms the importance of the context in which the historian forms his narrative, finding relevance in the manner by which meaning is communicated to the reader, and demonstrates how, through the denial of the linear retelling of history, the historian can act as the master narrator of past events.

In this manner, Barthes provides a link of sorts between Carr's conception of the selective historian who ascribes significance to particular historical events and White's belief that the historical narrative, as "a simulacrum of the structure and processes of real events,"[56] is imperative to its understanding in terms of content and form. Whereas Carr prefers to read historiography as an art, White believes that the narrativity of historical discourse has allowed it to mature into an objective discipline, "a science of a special sort but a science nonetheless."[57] Evident here is a significant tension in historical discourse between evaluating the past and transforming it into a subjective form of art, and the objective narrativisation of the past, which results in a fixed outcome, representative of history as a science.

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[55] Hayden White, 'Historicism, History and the Figurative Imagination', *The Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 115.

[56] White, *The Content of the Form*, p. 27.

[57] Ibid., p. 24. He further describes it as a science in which the presence of narrativity as a value in dealing with "real" events signals "its objectivity, its seriousness, and its realism" (ibid.).

Historical cinema

Film has engaged with a diverse and dynamic range of historical representation and interpretation. Historical cinema itself is a genre with a lineage reaching back to the earliest iterations of the form, yet it is also extensive, mutable, and hard to define. The genre's relationship with more "accepted" forms of history—written accounts produced by professional historians, thoroughly researched, verified and acknowledged—has a similarly variable and problematic ancestry. In 'The Historical Film as Real History', Robert Rosenstone pleads for historical film to be taken seriously while concurrently suggesting why it is not:

> [H]istorical films trouble and disturb (most) professional historians. Why? […] Because, historians will say, films are inaccurate. They distort the past. They fictionalize, trivialize, and romanticize important people, events, and movements. They falsify History.[58]

Rosenstone's work over the last two decades has been particularly influential in defining different varieties of historical film, examining how historical worlds are constructed, and how historical cinema can be read, judged and criticised. Central to these interpretative processes are issues relevant to "professional," written history, concepts that are necessary for the construction of historical narratives, such as invention, compression, condensation, conflation, summation, and symbolisation. In turn, these notions relate to ongoing discourses of historical "realism" and the binary

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[58] Robert A. Rosenstone, 'The Historical Film as Real History', *Film-Historia* 5:1 (1995), p. 5. Writing earlier, R.J. Raack suggested that film is actually a superior medium for history as traditional written history is too linear and narrow in focus; only film can approximate real life and capture the "liveness of the past." See R.J. Raack, 'Historiography as Cinematography: A Prolegomenon to Film Work for Historians', *Journal of Contemporary History* 18 (July 1983), p. 416, 418. Robert Burgoyne goes even further, stating: "Film, better than any other medium, can provide a vivid experience and a powerful emotional relationship with a world that is unfamiliar. To employ another vocabulary, historical film can defamiliarize our image of the past." See Robert Burgoyne, *The Hollywood Historical Film* (Malden, MA & Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), p. 11.

of true and false, and the engagement with existing issues, ideas, data and arguments are requirements of films that are read as works of history.

Prior to Rosenstone's extended focus on historical cinema there were several important works concerning film and history by writers such as Pierre Sorlin, Warren I. Susman, Marc Ferro, and Robert C. Allen & Douglas Gomery. Their work engages with a series of emerging debates surrounding the depiction of history through cinema that coincide with a period of disciplinary change concerning historiography in which historiographical narratives are being interrogated and explored in terms of both their reliability as historical texts and how they are affected by new modes of representation in film and television. This section, therefore, represents a leap from the field of historiography into a more filmic context. As well as returning to the work of Hayden White, I will consider several texts by Rosenstone, Robert Brent Toplin and Robert Burgoyne, as their work has been at the centre of the realm of film historiography in recent years.

In *Language and Cinema*, a key work in establishing the basis for a semiotic approach in studying films as texts, Christian Metz makes an important distinction between the "cinematic fact" and the "filmic fact." In regarding cinema as a "vast and complex socio-cultural phenomenon, a sort of *total social fact*," he is able to view its study as "a heteroclite collection of observations involving multiple and diverse points of view."[59] This plurality of criteria of relevancy indicates that cinema should be treated as an

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[59] Christian Metz, *Language and Cinema*, translated by Donna Jean Umiker-Sebeok (The Hague & Paris: Mouton & Co., 1974), p. 9.

unknowable object of scientific understanding.[60] Metz presents this important factual

distinction as film is only a small constituent of the cinema: cinema represents a vast

ensemble of phenomena that exist before (economics of production and financing,

technological equipment, etc.), during (social rituals of projection, exhibition, and

spectatorship), and after (the film's social, political, and ideological impact, audience

responses and mythologies) the film itself.[61] This distinction allows us to "restrict the

meaning of the term 'film' to a more manageable, specifiable signifying discourse, in

contrast with 'cinema' which, as defined here, constitutes a larger complex [comprised

of] the technological, the economic, and the sociological."[62] The implications of this

distinction apply to the differentiations between forms of filmic history, its

representations, manifestations, associations and repercussions, and will prove useful

when reviewing the work of those dealing more directly with the relations between

film and history.

Pierre Sorlin, a sociologist and historian, believes that historiography is "the ideal

instrument for approaching the study of the problems that are current concerns in a

society and for understanding the picture it has of its future."[63] In *The Film in History*

he attempts to examine how this type of film communicates history to the viewer and

asks the interpreter to resist comparing these narratives with their knowledge of the

periods covered, citing the key difficulty for historians when studying films:

"everything that he considers history is ignored; everything he sees on the screen is, in

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[60] With regard to the "multi-dimensional phenomenon" of cinema, Metz describes the "theoretician of the cinema" as, in turn, a historian, an economist, an aesthetician, a semiotician, and, finally, a universal anthropologist.
[61] Metz states that this distinction was originally made by Gilbert Cohen-Séat in *Essai sur les principies d'une philosophie du cinéma* (Paris: P.U.F., 1946).
[62] Metz, *Language and Cinema*, p. 12.
[63] Pierre Sorlin, *The Film in History: Restaging the Past* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), p. 17.

his opinion, pure imagination."[64] The signs by which historical films can be identified by spectators are twofold: audiences recognise the existence of "historical knowledge," a system of knowledge that is already clearly defined; and there must be details "to set the action in a period which the audience unhesitatingly places in the past—not a vague past but a past considered as historical."[65] What these two processes allow for is an understanding between filmmakers and audiences: "for both, something real and unquestionable exists, something which definitely happened and which is history."[66] For Sorlin, this does not consequentially make the "historical film" a *historical work*, as it does not claim to reproduce the past accurately.[67] Sorlin's methodology involves grasping significant structural patterns, conceptual models that help to describe the organisation and mutual relations of a complex whole by assessing material and seeing how it stands in relation to other material. This detailed examination of historical themes, elements and processes helps to draw out the multiplicity of meanings and significances that interpretations of history raise and express.

Allen and Gomery's *Film History: Theory and Practice* is an important text in introducing film historiography to the widening field of film scholarship, taking a "realist" approach in their study of social film history and historiography.[68] This realist

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[64] Ibid., p. ix.

[65] Ibid., p. 20.

[66] Ibid., pp. 20-21.

[67] I would argue, however, that films of this nature not only attempt to show the truth of events, but that they have also frequently been marketed and promoted as reproducing the past in a variety of forms.

[68] This canonical work, published in 1985, is an important didactic text that explores issues of film historiography and methodology, separating traditional approaches to film history into four main categories: aesthetic, technological, economic, and social film histories. However, it is worth noting that the examples they use are inclined towards their own particular research interests in the history of early cinema. For Allen & Gomery, the study of cinema history has been understood and written about is the

response—an approach also defined as "neo-positivist" by Thomas Elsaesser[69]—is not related to André Bazin's aesthetic theory of cinema experiencing the real world, but is instead derived from a realist philosophy of science: they assert that "there is a world that exists independently of the scientist," and, as with empiricism, "the goal of science [is] the explanation of that world."[70] Due to the complexity of reality it can only partially be observed, so in order to comprehend it we must first explain the generating mechanisms that produce what is observable. In this instance, a realist approach to film history views the past as existing independently of the historian and regards historical evidence as "the partial, mediated, yet indispensable record of the past."[71] The medium of cinema has, since its inception, "participated in many networks of relationships," acting as an open system of interrelated components conditioned by each other, namely aesthetics, technological developments, economic factors, and social contexts.[72] This approach, then, requires understanding film history as an open system, and insists that historical explanations should be tested by reference to both historical evidence and competing explanations to describe how the generative mechanisms of history operate at a number of levels and with uneven effect.

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domain of cinema historiography, whereas film history is the study of the development of cinema, located in precise and concrete moments of the past and working through particular assumptions about what history is, its object of study, and its methods.

[69] Thomas Elsaesser, 'The New Film History', *Sight and Sound* 55:4 (Autumn 1986), pp. 246-251. This methodological framework can be seen as a reaction to the auteur-orientated studies of the 1960s, as well as a movement against the dominant theoretical approaches of the 1970s, such as semiotics and psychoanalysis.

[70] Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York, London: McGraw-Hill, 1985), p. 14.

[71] Ibid., p. 16.

[72] Ibid., pp. 16-17.

In 'Film and History: Artifact and Experience', Warren I. Susman provides an overarching view of American cinema's engagement with history on several levels: "as products of wider historical events, as reflections of their production eras, as self-conscious interpreters of history, and as powerful historical agents for change."[73] Susman stresses that historical cinema does not necessarily constitute passive reflections of the social milieu but is part of a more complex discourse that needs to be analysed and dissected. As J.E. Smyth notes, "it is his discussion of Hollywood cinema's potential to articulate self-conscious, historiographic discourse and engage critically with the past which resonates most powerfully."[74] Rosenstone's work is particularly relevant in how it broadens the interest in the historical film (and its filmmakers), and suggesting that cinema has a different "filmic" language that is separate from written history; this addresses some key questions raised by Ferro and White concerning how we think of the "filmic writing" of history. But this, too, is an issue that Susman tackled earlier, arguing that "the traditional unities of time and space act as an historian faced with the same problem of finding the proper arrangement of materials to provide a view of the process which is history."[75] In formulating an overarching historical argument, filmmakers encounter the same problems encountered in all processes of historicisation, and these practices similarly serve particular historical perspectives or

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[73] Warren I. Susman, 'Film and History: Artifact and Experience', in J.E. Smyth (ed.). *Hollywood and the American Historical Film* (London & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 5. Originally presented at the Astoria Foundation in New York in November 1983, and published in *Film & History* 15:2 (1985), pp. 26-36.

[74] Smyth, *Hollywood and the American Historical Film*, p. xvi. For instance, Susman's claim that "John Ford is perhaps the most influential *historian* of the United States in the twentieth century" (Susman, p. 5) clashed with *Cahiers du cinéma*'s famous analysis of Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939) (published as 'Young Mr. Lincoln, texte collectif' in *Cahiers du cinéma* 223 [August 1970] and translated in *Screen* 13 [Autumn 1972], pp. 5-44). Yet this has had a clear and vital influence on more recent work on the historical film, from Robert Brent Toplin's *Oliver Stone's USA* to more contemporary debates about Steven Spielberg as a Hollywood historian (see Conclusion, pp. 341-345. Regarding the influence of Susman's work, Marc Ferro's *Cinema and History* was published several years later, followed by significant interventions by Hayden White, Robert Rosenstone and Robert Burgoyne.

[75] Susman, 'Film and History: Artifact and Experience', p. 5.

ideological agendas. Susman believes film to be a *product* of history that reflects the society in which it was made. He states:

> A film represents a significant arrangement of technology, social organization, and moral ideas; it comes into existence within the particular boundaries of a polity and an economy. The production history of a film itself thus often re-enacts the larger historical movement of forces, and the examination of a film can inform us of these developments.[76]

Susman's work raises important questions about the relationship between the text and context of historical cinema, and the status of film as both the artifact and the experience of history. But, as he states, history itself represents two separate factors: "the ongoing flux of human experience over time and space, *and* the effort by men and women to order and structure that experience in an effort to provide special meaning."[77]

Leading on from Metz's demarcation between the social dimension of the cinematic fact and the filmic fact as a circumscribed discourse, Marc Ferro is principally interested in cinema as constituting a valuable document for the study of history, what it tells us about the spirit ("mentalité") of an era, and how the avenues of cinema and history intersect.[78] These intersections demonstrate the status of film as an "agent" and "source" of history, but one ignored by "real" historians. In his essay 'Legend and History', Ferro proves that film has the ability to reveal a great deal about the external aspects of a historical moment, as well as indicating more about social attitudes,

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[76] Ibid., p. 3.
[77] Ibid., p. 9.
[78] Marc Ferro, *Cinema and History*, translated by Naomi Greene (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988). Originally published in French (Paris: Denoël) as *Cinéma et Histoire* in 1976. Following renewed interest in the field after the publication of Allen and Gomery's *Film History*, it was later translated into English by Naomi Greene and published in 1988.

beliefs and ideological trends than traditional forms of historical documentation. He argues that some films can serve to replace history itself, with the imaginative re-creation of history seeming more "real" for audiences than the "historical fact."[79] In his study of films such as *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), *Napoléon* (1927) and *October: Ten Days That Shook the World* (1928), Ferro carries out the strict practice of textual analysis in order to sustain his arguments that representations of history in cinematic terms are often at odds with historical events and their traditional interpretations.[80] In these cases "myth triumphs over what really happened,"[81] though with different results, whereby one version of history replaces another but we are left with the work of art itself, forcing us to distinguish between the static object of art (imaginative memory) and the fluctuating object of history (historical discourse).[82]

In 'Historiography and Historiophoty', Hayden White uses Rosenstone's essay 'History in Images/History in Words' to raise two key questions about the relative adequacy of "historio*photy*" ("the representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and filmic discourse") to the criteria of truth and accuracy presented through traditional forms of "historio*graphy*" ("the representation of history in verbal images

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[79] Ferro understands films as testimonies or witnesses of the past, with each film having "a history that is History, with its network of personal relationships, its order of objects and men where privileges and burdens, hierarchies and honors are regulated" (ibid., p. 18).

[80] In the case of *Battleship Potemkin*, Ferro states that "legend has managed to assume the appearance of truth," labelling "the spirit" and "some of the details" of this legend as "authentic" but also noting that "the majority of the facts came from Eisenstein's imagination" (ibid., p. 68). Eisenstein's creation of the facts that form the legend derive from a failure of collective memory, as original accounts of the mutiny had been had been "erased from memory. It was hardly remembered and discussed even less" (ibid., p. 69). The integration of the filmic account into official history, and thus historical memory, demonstrates for Ferro that "history often preserves only what legitimizes the power of those govern" (ibid., p. 70). *Napoléon*, on the other hand, exhibits the construction of a central narrative "in accordance with the demands of *one* national memory" (ibid., p. 72), retracing explicit events rather than seeking relationships through Eisenstein's practice of reconstruction.

[81] Ibid., p. 73.

[82] Moreover, Ferro's examples demonstrate how dominant ideologies have a power over historiography in terms of assigning both the sources and the agency regarding particular events.

and written discourse"), and the challenge posed by the former to the latter.[83] White believes that Rosenstone provides a convincing argument that films are able to convey qualified and critical dimensions of historical thinking in order to produce distinctly "historical" accounts in their own right.[84] However, these two terms share certain features in their production, namely processes of "condensation, displacement, symbolization, and qualification."[85] While Rosenstone describes *The Return of Martin Guerre* (1982) as a "historical romance" and draws comparison to the "historical narrative,"[86] White sees the "historical novel" as a more fruitful contrast:

> Like the historical novel, the historical film draws attention to the extent to which it is a constructed or, as Rosenstone calls it, a "shaped" representation of a reality we historians would prefer to consider to be "found" in the events themselves or, if not there, then at least in the "facts" that have been established by historians' investigation of the record of the past. […] [T]here is no reason why a filmed representation of historical events should not be as analytical and realistic as any written account.[87]

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[83] Hayden White, 'Historiography and Historiophoty', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 93, No. 5 (December 1988), p. 1193. Available at *Jstor*: http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/1873534, accessed 07/06/12. See Robert A. Rosenstone, 'History in Images/History in Words: Reflections on the Possibility of Really Putting History onto Film', *The American Historical Review* Vol. 93, No. 5 (December 1988), pp. 1173-1185. Available at *Jstor*: http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/1873532, accessed 07/06/12. In 'History in Images/History in Words', Rosenstone states that, despite the fact that the chief source of historical knowledge today derives from visual media, films are unable to "fulfil many of the basic demands for truth and verifiability used by all historians" (p. 1174). The different historical approaches and divergent scholarly requirements for historians are evident in the opposing opinions of R.J. Raack and Ian Jarvie to which Rosenstone refers (see R.J. Raack, 'Historiography as Cinematography', pp. 416, 418; and I.C. Jarvie, 'Seeing Through Movies', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 8:4 [December 1978], p. 378).

[84] Rosenstone lists the effects of historians' prejudices against historiophoty, indicating that the issues raised when depicting history on film derive from the fact that this is a process of translation from a written discourse into an imagistic one, leading to one questioning what gets lost in this translation: "is it possible to tell historical stories on film and not lose out professional or intellectual souls?" he asks ('History in Images/History in Words', p. 1175). He cites the accuracy of detail, complexity of explanation, the auto-critical and inter-critical dimensions of historiological reflection, and the qualifications of generalisations necessitated by the absence or unavailability of evidence as factors that can be diminished in this process of translation. Moreover, he highlights the fact that any form of historiography shares the same limitations as those that some historians have identified within historiophoty (ibid., pp. 1178-1180).

[85] White, 'Historiography and Historiophoty', p. 1194.

[86] Rosenstone, 'History in Images/History in Words', p. 1180.

[87] White, 'Historiography and Historiophoty', pp. 1195-1196.

White also warns modern historians that visual images require a different mode of "reading," and that imagistic representations of history employ a language and discursive mode quite different from that used in verbal discourses.[88]

Expanding on a suggestion made by theorist Frank Ankersmit—that the truths of historical discourse are not located primarily in the individual details of a work, but in the arguments and metaphors that allow us to think about and understand that past[89]— Rosenstone asks historians and critical thinkers to "stop expecting films to do what (we imagine) books do":

> Like written histories, films are not mirrors but constructions, works whose rules of engagement with the traces of the past are necessarily different from those of written history. How could they be the same (and who would want them to be), since it is precisely the task of film to add movement, color, sound, and drama to the past?[90]

Rosenstone believes the process of invention in the making of historical films is a strength rather than a weakness, with filmmakers selecting certain "traces" of the past—like other historians—but having to go beyond "constituting" facts by inventing them in a past that "fits within the demands, practices, and traditions of both the visual media and the dramatic form."[91] Without these inventions—condensation of events, conflations of character, alterations of chronology, etc.—the historical world of

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[88] Rather than merely treating historical imagery as a supplement to verbal evidence, White argues that it should be used to complement it, seeing it as "a discourse in its own right and one capable of telling us things about its referents that are both different from what can be told in verbal discourse and also of a kind that can only be told by means of visual images" (ibid., p. 1193).

[89] F.R. Ankersmit, 'Historiography and Postmodernism', *History and Theory* 28:2 (May 1989), pp. 137-153. Available at *Jstor*:
http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/2505032?uid=2129&uid=2&uid=70&uid=4&sid=211026095885 97, accessed 05/09/13.

[90] Robert Rosenstone, 'Inventing Historical Truth on the Silver Screen' in Smyth (ed.), *Hollywood and the American Historical Film*, p. 184. Originally published in *Cineaste* 29: 2 (March 2004), pp. 29-33.

[91] Ibid., p. 185.

a film would be formless, rambling and unfocused. Historical characters, in their dialogue and action, are inventions too.[92] The experiential quality of the historical film returns us to Ankersmit's concept that the historical film contributes at the level of metaphor and argument, thus engaging with and stimulating further historical discourse. Invented incidents and characters can serve to amplify a film's power, relating to its argument and metaphoric thrust, and is what makes it "historical" by engaging with specific discourses.[93]

For Tony Barta, the historical film represents a paradoxical invisibility: the presentation of history is the re-presentation of the past (the past made present again), and its reconstruction requires an imaginative portrayal.[94] This notion of accessing and reconstructing the past from fragments relates to the work of several other key theorists, such as Paul Virilio, Walter Benjamin, and Gilles Deleuze.[95] Rosenstone furthers this discourse in *Visions of the Past*, noting a series of tendencies in the field of film and history, namely "the history of film as art and industry," the "analysis of film as a document (text) that provides a window onto the social and cultural concerns of an era," and the "investigation of how a visual medium, subject to the conventions of drama and fiction, might be used as a serious vehicle for thinking about our

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[92] For Rosenstone, dramatic situations in the historical film are another form of invention, one that "allows the screen to bring us history in the present tense, involve us through the unique, embodied quality of the film experience in the proximate realities of events and situations, and serve to move us emotionally and intellectually" (ibid).

[93] Rosenstone adds that these discourses, in turn, help us to "judge the values of the inventions which, to promote historical truths, must be apposite; that is, within the possibilities and probabilities of the given period" (ibid., p. 187)

[94] Tony Barta, 'History Since the Cinema', in *Screening the Past: Film and the Representation of History* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), p. 11.

[95] See Paul Virilio on "the logistics of perception" in *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception* (London: Verso, 1989), pp. 1-3, Walter Benjamin and the concept of "unnatural closeness" in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', *Illuminations* (London: Fontana, 1992), pp. 235-236, and Deleuze on the exteriority of photography and the fluidly organising capability of the shot and the sequence in *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Athlone Press, 1986), p. 23.

relationship to the past."[96]   He raises certain questions concerning how history changes when words are translated to image, and how we judge films by comparing them to written history: "If it is true that the word can do many things that images cannot, what about the reverse – don't images carry ideas and information that cannot be handled by the word?"[97]   Addressing his own historical practices of narrativising and asserting history, Rosenstone's subsequent objective was to chart the possibilities of historical cinema—"to understand from the inside how a filmmaker might go about rendering the past on film"[98]—an approach he believed to be unique in that "no academics seem willing to consider the possibility that filmmakers may have as much right to think about the past as do historians."[99]

In *The Hollywood Historical Film* Robert Burgoyne conveys the ways in which the history film has shaped our understanding of the past through both cinematic re-creation and its arousal of public debate. In contrast to Natalie Zemon Davies, who characterises the historical genre as being composed of dramatic films in which either the main plot is based on documented historical events, or an imagined plot takes place in a historical setting in which real events have a particular impact or influence,[100] Burgoyne takes a broader view of the extent of the genre: "Like many genres, the historical film has developed several different variants, branching off into distinct subtypes such as the war film, the epic, the biographical film, the topical film,

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[96] Robert A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 3.

[97] Ibid., p. 5. In drawing from his historical writing projects of the 1980s, he is able to impart some of the main issues that concern the historian, "problems of weighing evidence, making sense of random data, explaining the inexplicable, and constructing a meaningful past" (Ibid.).

[98] Ibid., p. 6.

[99] Ibid., p. 7.

[100] Natalie Zemon Davis, *Slaves on Screen: Film and Historical Vision* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

and evolving new, contemporary forms such as the metahistorical film."[101]   Davies'

reading of the genre is heavily focused on plot, failing to consider the more complex or

intricate (and therefore more problematic) mixing of historical and fictional events and

characters.   Burgoyne, in contrast, considers the manner by which the past can be

reshaped to reflect contemporary concerns, a practice that can distort documented

history.

Robert Brent Toplin also approaches the genre with the recognition that Hollywood's

versions of the past have a significant impact on audiences,[102] analysing its

representation of American history by re-evaluating the impact of filmmakers in their

role as historians.   Toplin's approach uses case studies "to show cinematic history in

greater depth and complexity by stepping behind and around the movies,"[103] that is, to

both study their production histories and place the films in the political and social

contexts of their period of production.   This allows his work to incorporate individual

perspectives of history, ways of dealing with historical evidence, the influence of

outside pressures, and the arguments that were provoked concerning historical

interpretation.[104]   Toplin's study examines four principal modes of cinematic history,

each of which are used to render history in engaging and comprehensible ways though

they may elicit objections: mixing fact with fiction; shaping evidence to reach specific

conclusions; suggesting messages for the present; and employing a documentary style

to focus on historical individuals.   In *Reel History*, Toplin goes further in challenging

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[101] Burgoyne, *The Hollywood Historical Film*, p. 2.

[102] He cites such examples as *Sergeant York* (1941) and *Patton* (1970) as shaping versions of events and historical figures for millions of viewers. See Robert Brent Toplin, *History by Hollywood: The Use and Abuse of the American Past* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), p. vii.

[103] Ibid., p. xi.

[104] Toplin also acknowledges that films set in the past which feature largely invented characters or incidents are also worthy of examination regarding their treatment of history.

these negative assessments of historical cinema through a more open-minded approach, suggesting that movies can communicate important ideas and raise significant questions about the past that are different from written history or pedagogical forms.[105]

Resembling my methodological framework, Robert Rosenstone's *History on Film/Film on History* examines the discursive characteristics of the genre by employing close, sustained analysis of individual texts. He sees history as a series of conventions for thinking about the past, and while these conventions continue to shift, filmmakers are more able to enter into, contest, and engage with new and existing arguments regarding historical discourse. History can thus be used as a challenge, provocation, or paradox. Studying the manners in which modern filmmakers draw on historical material to form their narratives, Rosenstone believes directors such as Oliver Stone can be considered as "cinematic historians."[106] He views particular filmmakers[107] as being obsessed and burdened by the past: "All keep returning to deal with it by making historical films, not as a simple source of escape or entertainment, but as a way of understanding how the problems and issues that it poses are still alive for us in the

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[105] He also shifts culpability away from the filmmakers, believing that "many of the complaints we hear about cinematic history are unrealistic and irrelevant," as protests against cinematic history "often demonstrate little appreciation of the challenges filmmakers encounter when they attempt to bring the past to life on the screen" (ibid., p. 2).

[106] Although Stone refutes this claim, Rosenstone continues this argument in his essay "Oliver Stone As Historian" in Robert Brent Toplin (ed.), *Oliver Stone's USA: Film, History and Controversy*, pp. 26-39.

[107] Rosenstone considers the specific films or entire bodies of work of filmmakers such as Andrzej Wajda, Miklos Jansco, Theo Angelopolous, Carlos Saura, Hsou Hsien and Emir Kusturica. J.E. Smyth also engages with this debate about the filmmaker as historian in *Reconstructing American Historical Cinema*, emphasising the difference between modern filmmakers and D.W. Griffith, who was "often subject to professional historians' contempt and public controversy" despite the fact that *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) was considered the benchmark for Hollywood historical cinema (Smyth, *Reconstructing American Historical Cinema*, p. 4).

present."[108]   His proposal of thinking of filmmakers as historians relies on the

acceptance of a new form of history that conveys different sorts of knowledge and

understanding, with filmmakers creating experiences that both engage with and add to

the discourse of history.

It needs to be understood that, for Rosenstone, all history is a construction rather than

a reflection, "an ideological and cultural product of the Western World at a particular

time in its development"[109] that forms a series of conventions for thinking about the

past.   Language itself becomes a convention for performing history, in privileging

particular elements of facts, analysis, and linearity.   While he admits that history *can

be* a mode of thinking that uses sound, vision, montage and feeling rather than merely

the written word, Rosenstone asserts: "Dramatic films and documentaries deliver the

past in a highly developed, polished form that serves to suppress rather than raise

questions.   Too often such works do little more than illustrate the familiar.   Rarely do

they push beyond the boundaries of what we already know."[110]   This observation is

one that relates to my own research in that I am looking to identify patterns of

historical change relating to the representation of historical figures and events in less

"developed" or "polished" forms; these more ambiguous texts serve not to merely

show history but to *involve* spectators in the past and force them to pose questions of

these historical narratives.   Like Rosenstone, I am looking to demonstrate how the

historical film can "offer a new relationship to the world of the past."[111]   My case

studies act as forays, provocations and explorations into contemporary forms of

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[108] Robert A. Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History* (Harlow & New York: Longman/Pearson, 2006), p. 117.

[109] Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*, p. 11.

[110] Ibid.

[111] Ibid., p. 12.

historical reassessment that are influenced, in part, by advancing technologies and new attitudes to the recent and distant past.

In his edited collection, *Revisioning History*, Rosenstone reiterates that "the historical film must be seen not in terms of how it compares to written history but as a way of recounting the past with its own rules of representation,"[112] proposing the category of the "New History film". This is characterised by its differences from the model of Hollywood historical film regarding intent, content, and form.[113] The main divergence is that this type of film is constructed in order to study the past critically and extract meaning: "their aim is less to entertain or make profits than to understand the legacy of the past."[114] In order to accomplish this within the realm of visual history, Rosenstone puts forth that the New History film undertakes a task of contesting, visioning, or revisioning history. Contestation involves building an interpretation of the past between abstract ideas that traditional history works with, challenging history as these abstractions are unable to explain specific historical events due to their incompleteness.[115] The visioning of history entails the shaping of history through aural and visual elements to "create stories that vision history in terms of how individual lives are altered by larger events or even abstract processes named by scholars,"[116] given the specific representational strategies of film and its existence as a storytelling

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[112] Robert A. Rosenstone, *Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 3.
[113] Rosenstone cites such films as *Reds* (1981), *Walker* (1987), *Sans soleil* (1983), *JFK* (1991), *Malcolm X* (1992) and *Schindler's List* (1993) as texts that question or problematise previous versions of history.
[114] Ibid., p. 4.
[115] Rosenstone uses *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988), *The Home and the World* (1984), *Eijanaika* (1981) and *Night of the Shooting Stars* (1982) as examples.
[116] Ibid., p. 10.

device.[117]   Revisioning history requires challenging the precepts of realism as the quintessential mode of historical representation, presenting interpretations of the past through innovative and inventive modes of representation.[118]   These films often represent extreme periods of history through extreme aesthetic modes, and "foreground their own construction and point to the arbitrary nature of knowledge"[119] by employing such strategies as surrealism, collage, expressionism, mythic rumination, and postmodernism.

According to Rosenstone's definition, then, New History films provide a series of challenges to written history by testing the boundaries of its conventional forms of representations. Simultaneously, they also propose new interpretations of the past through alternate practices that have the potential to transform the way we relate to and understand the past. The extent to which the films adequately "embody [their] ongoing issues and insert themselves into the ideas and debates surrounding a historical topic"[120] determines how they can be judged from a historiographical perspective, thus extending White's notion that the representation of particular historical events through traditional storytelling has led to a diminished legitimisation of events, as well as questioning the appropriateness of previous modernist forms in their formulation. While Rosenstone's structural categories address the diverse nature

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[117] Rosenstone uses *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959), *Memories of Underdevelopment* (1968), *The Moderns* (1988) and *Radio Bikini* (1988) as examples.

[118] Rosenstone uses *Repentance* (1984), *Hitler: A Film from Germany* (1977), *Walker* (1987) and *From the Pole to the Equator* (1987) as examples.

[119] Ibid., p. 11. Rosenstone devotes further attention to the varieties of historical film in 'The Historical Film: Looking at the Past in a Postliterate Age' in Marcia Landy (ed.), *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), pp. 50-66. He draws contrasts between mainstream and experimental historical cinema in how they construct historical worlds, creating a new kind of history that is closer to oral history but operating within different limited boundaries, and concludes that film can be seen as the postliterate equivalent of preliterate ways of dealing with the past in creating aesthetic moments that perhaps cannot be evaluated historically.

[120] Rosenstone, *Revisioning History*, p. 7.

of historical cinema and its range of interpretations, the application of these delineations seems to be highly subjective. With regard to my chosen corpus, it is important to identify the representational strategies and narratological constructions involved in order to understand the historical discourses they put forth.[121] Only then is it possible to construct a pattern of historical representation that demonstrates how films relate to "official" and alternative versions of history, and to reflect the innovative and oppositional interpretations that derive from the films' cultural contexts. However, while recent investigations of the historical film—such as those of Burgoyne, Toplin and Rosenstone—provide expedient frameworks for looking at issues of style, narrative and genre, their assertions are less adequate when considering technological and aesthetic concerns.

Film, technology, and the digital

Digital filmmaking raises issues of ontology and epistemology in relation to the problematic status of film *as* history, of the cinematic image as evidence, document, or truth. The developments evident in the proliferation and practices of digital filmmaking may point to it as the way forward for the industry, but it certainly contributes to a diversification of both production and aesthetics in which history is both re-constructed and engaged with in ways distinct from the traditional, classical forms that Hollywood has encouraged. Debates surrounding the impact of digital filmmaking practices and the future of the format have been overshadowed in recent time by frequent prophesies concerning the "death of cinema." From Godfrey

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[121] This includes relating the key texts to more traditional (generic) forms of historical storytelling in terms of archetypal categories and narratives, as well as other forms of non-traditional historical narratives that involve revisioning or reworking the past in alternate modes.

Cheshire's influential 1999 article, 'The Death of Film/The Decay of Cinema'[122] and

Paolo Churchi Usai's *The Death of Cinema: History, Cultural Memory, and the Digital*

Dark Age[123] to more recent work such as Matt Zoller Seitz's 'R.I.P., the movie camera:

1888-2011',[124] new digital technologies have been treated with apprehension,

trepidation, and a certain degree of scepticism, resulting in wide-ranging forms of

analogue nostalgia.[125] While much of this work examines, questions and attempts to

predict the impact of new technologies on production, distribution and exhibition

strategies, I am more concerned with how these technologies are employed, the ways

in which they create new aesthetics, textures and formal engagements, and, more

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[122] Cheshire's work, among others, is indebted to Susan Sontag's article, 'The Decay of Cinema',
published in *The New York Times* in 1996 (available at:
http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/03/12/specials/sontag-cinema.html, accessed 29/10/13). Although
it was perhaps too early to cite the impact of digital filmmaking, Sontag does attribute the death of
cinephilia to several factors relating to technological advances, such as the advent of television, faster
editing, and the ubiquity of moving images in advertising and other media.

[123] Usai argues that digital moving images are immune from decay and have no history, but they are
subject to similar changes over time. Digital creates a Model Image that is displayed through electronic,
non-photographic (in the strictest sense of the term) means. See Paolo Churchi Usai, *The Death of
Cinema: History, Cultural Memory, and the Digital Dark Age* (London: British Film Institute, 2001), pp.
31-33.

[124] Seitz's article details the cessation of the production of motion picture film cameras. Matt Zoller
Seitz, 'R.I.P., the movie camera: 1888-2011', *Salon* [Online], 13 October 2011. Available at:
http://www.salon.com/2011/10/13/r_i_p_the_movie_camera_1888_2011/, accessed 29/10/13.

[125] This debate has raged for a long period of time and frequently recurs due to the development and
adoption of new technologies. Many critics, writers and filmmakers have contributed to what David
Bordwell describes it as "a quintessentially empty polemic" (Bordwell, 'Got those death-of-
film/movies/cinema blues?': http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2012/10/15/got-those-death-of-
filmmoviescinema-blues/, accessed 29/10/13), including Walter Murch ('A Digital Cinema of the Mind?
Could Be', 1999: http://filmsound.org/theory/nyt5.htm, accessed 29/10/13), Peter Greenaway
('Greenaway announces the death of cinema', 2007:
http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/greenaway-announces-the-death-of-cinema--and-
blames-the-remotecontrol-zapper-394546.html, accessed 29/10/13), Jean-Luc Godard ('Film is over.
What to do?' 2011: http://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/jul/12/jean-luc-godard-film-socialisme,
accessed 29/10/13) and, more recently, David Denby ('Has Hollywood Murdered the Movies?', 2012:
http://www.newrepublic.com/article/books-and-arts/magazine/107212/has-hollywood-murdered-the-
movies, accessed 29/10/13), David Thomson ('American Movies Are Not Dead: They Are Dying', 2012:
http://www.newrepublic.com/article/books-and-arts/magazine/107218/not-dead-just-dying, accessed
29/10/13), Andrew O'Hehir ('Is movie culture dead?', 2012:
http://www.salon.com/2012/09/28/is_movie_culture_dead/, accessed 29/10/13), and Richard Brody
('The Movies Aren't Dying', 2012: http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/movies/2012/09/the-
movies-are-not-dying.html, accessed 29/10/13).

specifically, how they might provide a fresh or alternate perspective on historical figures and events.

Although there is a focus on the use of new digital technologies in this thesis, other questions of technology remain relevant to contemporary issues surrounding digital cinema and its depiction of history. In this study, discourses concerning the cinematic apparatus are of greater significance than those around sound or colour, especially with regard to notions of ontology and realism in cinema. In *Cinema and Technology*, Steve Neale provides a concise outline of the scientific and technical principles involved in studying the basic machinery of film, as well as discussing several economic, aesthetic and psychological contexts and effects that result from the development and adoption of these forms.[126] Neale contends that in order to comprehend the place of technology in cinema one must first understand the production and evolution of the cinematic apparatus through science; but it is also a question of "aesthetics, psychology, ideology and economics; of a set of conditions, effects, and contexts which affect, and are in turn affected by, the technologies employed by the cinema."[127] He argues that cinema, ontologically, is premised upon the existence, application, and development of particular technologies, from the camera to the projector, from chemical film to digital software, and from mechanical reproduction to mass distribution. He is, however, eager to point out that cinema is

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[126] Components of the cinematic experience have been discussed at length by Christian Metz, Jean-Louis Baudry and others in terms of the dream-like status of film, the hyperreality of the cinematic image, and the spectator's position of contemplative fascination, but Neale stresses that these experiences and phenomena derive from the social, cultural and historical significance of cinema and its technology. See Christian Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier', *Screen* 16:2 (Summer 1975), pp. 14-76, and Jean-Louis Baudry, 'Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus', *Film Quarterly* 28: 2 (Winter 1974), pp. 39-47, and Baudry, 'The Apparatus', *Camera Obscura* 1 (Fall 1976), pp. 104-126.

[127] Steve Neale, *Cinema and Technology: Image, Sound, Colour* (London: Macmillan Education, 1985), p. 1.

not reducible to these technologies, and in fact exists outside of them: "Its effects, its processes, its development cannot be explained by their existence alone."[128] Neale cites Christian Metz in describing cinema as a "mental machinery," an apparatus for the production of both meanings and pleasures, and thus involves aesthetic strategies and psychological processes.[129] For Neale, technology is involved at both of these levels as a necessary factor, but one that explains neither expression. Technology, as a basic proviso for cinema, is both a "condition of its existence and a continuing factor in its development," having its own specificity and history.[130]

The emergence of the cinematic apparatus in the late 19th century represented a confluence of the fields of technology, aesthetics, ideology, and economics.[131] The technical advancements of the apparatus occurred under specific historical, industrial and commercial conditions, and it was continually refined in light of its profitability. Innovations were made during this period in terms of projection (and hence exhibition), echoing the more recent industrial, economic and commercial changes that have led to the installation of large-scale projection/exhibition systems. In 'Cinema and Technology: A Historical Overview', Peter Wollen stresses the heterogeneity of film technology and its economic and cultural determinants of change, placing emphasis on film formats: "the crucial changes in the recording process have involved not the camera itself, as the Lumière legend suggests, but

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[128] Ibid.

[129] See Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier'.

[130] Neale, *Cinema and Technology*, p. 3.

[131] Neale points out that it was also "evolved and produced in the specific context of profitable capitalist industrial enterprises" under the conditions of "precision engineering, chemical technology, and mass production and industrial standardisation that shaped the growth and development of the industry and its technology" (ibid., p. 47).

changes in film stock."[132]   These are breakthroughs of chemistry as opposed to

mechanics, of improving speed/grain ratios and faster, more sensitive emulsions.[133]

Constantly improving stocks and the more recent shift to digital filmmaking makes

filming more affordable on a wider scale, as well as allowing films to be made in

situations with lower light due to the increased sensitivity of firstly the emulsions, and

secondly the digital sensors.[134] For Wollen, the emergence of colour video as a format

in the 1950s unites the three phases of articulation—recording, processing, and

exhibiting—through unifying these processes temporally, and he makes the astute

observation that "[i]t is only a matter of time before electronic technology gains the

ascendancy in image as well as sound."[135]   Only now, thirty years later, has digital

filmmaking partly replaced traditional film-based productions, though digital has been

progressively integrated into filmmaking practice through visual effects, editing

processes, and exhibition strategies as a result of myriad industrial, economic, and

technological motivations.[136]

André Bazin's essay, 'The Myth of Total Cinema', stresses the development of the

cinematic apparatus as a logically progressive response to a continual drive to replicate

reality, advancing in the direction of an ideal cinema that strives to represent the

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[132] Peter Wollen, 'Cinema and Technology: A Historical Overview' in Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath (eds.), *The Cinematic Apparatus* (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 15.

[133] Both Wollen and Neale point out that the invention of celluloid was a precondition for the invention of the cinema.

[134] Wollen notes that this causes a paradox when seen alongside the development of sound and colour that made filming more difficult. There are similarities here between the fact that colour required more light for filming and the contemporary lighting issues of the new 3D cinema, now shot using digital camera systems.

[135] Ibid., p. 19.

[136] For more on how digital cinema has effected change in the fields of film distribution, exhibition, advertising and reception, see Chuck Tryon, *Reinventing Cinema: Movies in the Age of Media Convergence* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009). However, while Tryon is attentive to a wide range commercial and non-commercial digital cinema practices—such as distribution models, exhibition strategies and viewer (prosumer) involvement—he is less interested in the impact of digital filmmaking on film aesthetics and meaning-making.

world of sensory experience. This "myth" is an autonomous, passive force that controls the development of cinema outside of the social context of technology, where innovation is seen as a purely formal change.[137] Bazin's assertion that the drive to replicate reality has been the dominant impulse of advancing cinematic technologies is knowingly idealist, and has thus come under particular criticism. This is taken up by Jean-Louis Comolli, who hypothesises that society is driven by representation and thus the social machine manufactures representations. The variation of cinematic techniques depends on "the offsettings, adjustments, arrangements carried out by a social configuration in order to represent itself, that is, at once to grasp itself, identify itself and itself produce itself in its representation."[138] These technical achievements can therefore be seen as social processes.

Bazin's idealism is similarly evinced by V.F. Perkins in *Film as Film*, an account of film technology and technique. While demonstrating that orthodox and realist theorists frequently understate the power and presence of technology in cinema, Perkins is keen to emphasise the optical magic of both the camera and the projector, and the illusionistic nature of the filmmaker: "Whenever we talk of the movie's realism, we are discussing its artifice as well."[139] Perkins identifies the relationship between realism and illusion as one that is interdependent, reflected in the development of cinema technologies, stating (with reference to Bazin) that "technology has propelled the

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[137] Jeanne Thomas Allen identifies this gradualist or evolutionary view of the technological progression as failing to consider the social processes of invention and how they inform discovery, stating that this approach "isolates the innovation itself from the social conditions which may account for observation and recognition and links it with a predecessor which, by hindsight, appears to be no more than a preliminary step." Technology, as the product of a complex social process, should therefore not be viewed formalistically. See Jeanne Thomas Allen, 'The Industrial Context of Film Technology: Standardisation and Patents' in de Lauretis and Heath (eds.), *The Cinematic Apparatus*, p. 27.
[138] Jean-Louis Comolli, 'Machines of the Visible', in de Lauretis and Heath (eds.), *The Cinematic Apparatus*, p. 121.
[139] V.F. Perkins, *Film as Film: Understanding and Judging Movies* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993), p. 43.

cinema steadily towards increased realism."[140]   Contemporary shifts towards digital

cinematic practices and their subsequent aesthetics through features such as high

definition, mobile camerawork, and extended depth of field[141] build upon Perkins'

views on the capabilities of celluloid:

> Film has been equipped to capture more aspects of reality and to interpose fewer of its own characteristics between audience and image so that the man in front of the screen comes ever nearer to seeing as much and as clearly as the man beside the camera.[142]

Greater realism is achieved through additions to cinematic representations (sound,

colour, widescreen), and digital can be identified as a further progression of filmic

realism, achieved through conditions of both production and exhibition to reduce

distortion and increase flexibility. Interpreting Perkins' auteurist approach, digital can

therefore be seen to offer new modes of expression to the filmmaker, emphasising

how technology can stimulate artistic control and creativity.

Media scholar Lev Manovich's influential study, *The Language of New Media*, identifies

the extent of the newness that emerges with new media, challenging the idea of a

historical break in film history.[143]   However, while he is intrigued by new media

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[140] Ibid.

[141] This move towards ever higher definitions and resolutions (as well as larger screens, IMAX and 3D) could be seen as serving to "satisfy, once and for all and in its very essence, our obsession with realism." See André Bazin, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image' in *What Is Cinema?* Volume 1, translated by Hugh Gray (Berkeley & London: University of California Press, 1972), p. 12.

[142] Perkins, *Film as Film*, p. 43.

[143] Cultural theorists, artists and technicians, as well as consumer cultures, have made claims about the novelty of digital representation, but Philip Rosen questions the historical self-consciousness implicit in ideals of the digital: "The very assertion of newness links this conceptualization to the 'old' modernist historicity, and in profound ways." Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. 304.

aesthetics, this interest is linked to previously established modes of visual culture.[144]

Similarly, Laura Mulvey turns to the same question of technological novelty in *Death 24x a Second*, explaining how new digital forms (such as DVDs) offer access to classical cinema in different ways by foregrounding the relationship between motion and stillness.[145] Although Mulvey is more interested in psychoanalytic processes and cinematic time, she also engages with the effects of new technologies on modes of spectatorial perception which intersects with my own concerns regarding how historical films are made and received. Taking a more theoretical approach, in 'Cinema Futures' Thomas Elsaesser elaborates on how technological specificity is challenged by audiovisual practices that may perpetuate the ontological and epistemological implications of photographic indexicality.[146] Elsaesser considers media specificity to consist of convergences and divergences that are driven by market strategies and demands rather than by technological factors. Mary Ann Doane's book *The Emergence of Cinematic Time* resonates with Elsaesser's work by exploring how the powers of indexicality are linked to the unique immediacy of "liveness" rather than in technical

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[144] Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA & London: The MIT Press, 2001), pp. 78-88. In *Cane, Abel, or Cable?* Elsaesser presents a careful yet forceful argument about the influence of new technologies: digital cameras do not spell the end of celluloid, of film as we know it, but each new technological medium will indubitably have its own range of influence and may affect both form and function of the product(s) in question. His essay 'Digital Cinema: Delivery, Event, Time' contends that digital is merely another step in the progressive stride of cinema: "Yes, [cinema] will remain the same, *and* it will be utterly different, it is already utterly different. For [...] the digital is not only a new technique of post-production work and a new delivery system or storage medium, it is the new horizon of thinking about cinema." See Thomas Elsaesser, 'Digital Cinema: Delivery, Event, Time', in Elsaesser and Kay Hoffman (eds.), *Cinema Futures: Cain, Abel, or Cable? The Screen Arts in the Digital Age* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1998), pp. 204-205. In spite of this "newness," Nicholas Rombes adds that, "no matter what technologies are used in the making, editing and projection of film, they are still haunted by the history and logic of cinema." See Nicolas Rombes, *Cinema in the Digital Age* (London & New York: Wallflower Press, 2009), p. 3.

[145] Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), pp. 26-32.

[146] Thomas Elsaesser, 'Cinema Futures: Convergence, Divergence, Difference', in Elsaesser and Hoffman (eds.), *Cinema Futures: Cain, Abel, or Cable?*, pp. 9-26.

characteristics.[147] This notion that diverse technologies may be homogenised based on the cultural context of their use is also evoked in Philip Rosen's *Change Mummified*.[148]

In his exhaustively researched evaluation of technical filmmaking, *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis*, Barry Salt looks to the future of digital film production. He is sceptical about the repercussions of a shift to digital imaging, given the loss of resolution, and cites Gresham's Law when stating that most audiences can't tell the difference between true film and digital intermediates.[149] While Salt laments what is lost as we are transported from a photochemical form to a digital realm, believing that many cinematographic techniques have become "redundant," he also contends that "the basics of film form itself are not much affected by these developments."[150] This suggests that, despite the changes and technological advancements made in the world of digital filmmaking, cinema retains an integral set of ontological values, thus advancing the contention that digital is merely a particular stage in the ongoing development of the medium. While he also acknowledges the imperfections of the digital, Nicholas Rombes has suggested that analogue nostalgia is a response to the cultural conception of the digital image as pristine and seamless.[151]

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[147] Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 206-232.

[148] Rosen, *Change Mummified*, pp. 301-349. Rosen makes a distinction between digital and analogue as a matter of inscription: "Whereas analog inscription is relatively continuous and depends on physical contact between different substances, digital inscription is relatively discontinuous and depends on a seemingly arbitrary code of discrete, relational elements" (Ibid., p. 302).

[149] Barry Salt, *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis* (London: Starword, 2009), p. 276.

[150] Salt, *Film Style and Technology*, p. 276.

[151] Nicholas Rombes, *Cinema in the Digital Age*, p. 2. The main thrust of Rombes' book is that cinema is "haunted by the spectre of perfection," highlighting a tendency to "reassert *imperfections*, flaws, an aura of human mistakes to counterbalance the logic of perfection that pervades the digital" (ibid.). For Rombes, the digital shift has occurred on both a symbolic and literal one, and the digital image "threatens the fragility of the traditional logic of the image" (ibid., p. 1). This includes an ontological

Celluloid is now being thought about in the same way that silent movies were after the

transition to sound.[152]

In *New Digital Cinema*, Holly Willis traces the fundamental shift in perception and

creation that has accompanied the transition from analogue methods of sound and

image recording to digital technologies. One major idea that she derives from

postmodern theory concerns the indirect, transformative methods of digital capture,

turning physical reality into data rather than the material impressionism of

analogue.[153] In turn, this symbolises the end of Bazin's notion of the realist aesthetic

and the emergence of new visual forms.   Willis views the conceptual, nonlinear

applications of digital as a challenge to analogue forms rather than seeing the

integration of digital as a storytelling device much like celluloid, albeit with a different

look and feel. At this early stage of digital production, she astutely recognises that

"the industry at large works to make digital video indistinguishable from film,"[154]

reflecting Hollywood's desire for an aesthetic parity to accompany the format's

economic advantages. As digital video (DV) has advanced to a level that mimics or

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uncertainty based around the fact that, as Leo Enticknap states, "Digital media does not record a direct representation of a continuous process of chance. Instead, it represents that process as information, or data." See Leo Enticknap, *Moving Image Technology: From Zoetrope to Digital* (London & New York: Wallflower Press, 2005), p. 203.

[152] Films such as *The Aviator* (2004), *Hugo* (2011), and *Berberian Sound Studio* (2012) each comment on how filmmakers used to make movies and how audiences used to experience them.

[153] Willis, writing at a time before digital filmmaking became a mainstream practice, identifies its iterations in independent features as a "democratizing" approach evident in Dogme features, the "design" film with a "desktop" aesthetic characterised by multiple frames and flattened, abstract spaces, and the video installation, based on artistic forms of performance and body art. Holly Willis, *New Digital Cinema* (London & New York: Wallflower Press, 2005).

[154] Ibid., p. 38.

surpasses the resolution, tonal range and depth of field of celluloid, there has also been a significant shift in the way that films are shot and edited.[155]

Digital video has become increasingly preferable to film stock, subject to aesthetic requirements, budgetary constraints, and the director or cinematographer's partiality for the format.[156] The affordability and prevalence of digital technologies has led Stephen Prince to comment that "film is no longer a necessary condition for cinema,"[157] a statement that astutely conveys the large-scale shift from celluloid to digital.[158] Lisa Purse's *Digital Imaging in Popular Culture* and Prince's *Digital Visual Effects in Cinema* are two recent texts that engage with the most pressing issues surrounding digital cultures in contemporary cinema. In her book, Purse argues that the "digital-ness" of the digital image has the potential to produce connotations of its own, in part due to audiences' growing awareness of the capacities and presence of the digital within the film frame. Instead of fetishising digital technologies and special effects of mainstream cinema, she counters the arguments of those who dismiss digital imaging technologies as belonging outside of narrative and therefore not

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[155] Digital video obviated the difficult challenges posed by analogue video (editing, screening venues, and generational loss), radically altering the media (and beyond) since the early 1990s. Together with the internet, DV has changed the way we see and interact with the world, not just the cinema, in terms of the quality of the image and the reproduction of material that afford new modes of production.

[156] Several major directors such as Christopher Nolan, Quentin Tarantino and Paul Thomas Anderson are very much opposed to the quality and dominance of digital video.

[157] Stephen Prince, 'The Emergence of Filmic Artefacts: Cinema and Cinematography in the Digital Era', *Film Quarterly* 57:3 (2004), p. 30.

[158] This can be seen to refer back to Steve Neale's work on the relationship between photography and film, in which he states that photography is "a technical condition of the existence of film" (Neale, *Cinema and Technology*, p. 7). However, it can now be seen as merely a particular stage in the ongoing development of the medium (the evolution of the digital single-lens reflex cameras [DSLRs] to digital video cameras fits neatly into this conceptualisation). The empirical difference between film and photograph is one of number and movement: photographs are single, still images, whereas films consist of multiple images in motion. Thus there is a key distinction between a unique moment and a temporal sequence. For Neale, while photographs "construct a representation which, on viewing, always becomes a representation and an evidence *of the past*," film is different due to "the effect of presence that movement itself produces," and its duration ensures "a much greater sense of the present time of viewing and of the present time of what is being viewed" (ibid., p. 8).

worthy of critical analysis or consideration.[159] For Purse, digital practices "not only

replace earlier technologies, they also replace the rituals and processes that clustered

around those earlier technologies."[160]

Taking a formalist, aesthetic and theoretical approach, Prince is less interested in

extrapolating social or psychological themes from films that employ visual effects than

analysing the filmmakers and their practices, "what toolsets they have available, how

these relate to earlier traditions of visual effects, and how the era of digital imaging in

cinema connects with and departs from the photochemical medium that has been the

traditional format."[161] In *From Light to Byte*, Markos Hadjioannou examines the

relationship between celluloid modes and digital practices in the creation and

perception of images, recognising how this technological transition has affected how

films are both produced and received. In his view, the emergence of digital cinema has

caused a historical and theoretical rupture that involves both repeating and changing

celluloid culture in ways that can be differentiated and defined. While the majority of

scholars working on digital media have turned to the technical and ontological basis of

the image as the primary point of departure, Hadjioannou proposes that the creative

and perceptual activities of filmmakers should also be considered when addressing the

question of cinema ontology, relating to how the digital configures its relation to

reality while reworking and destabilising the ontological structures of celluloid. By

examining how the movie image has been altered following the introduction of digital

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[159] Purse notes that "digital or digitised practices have found their way into almost every aspect of filmmaking, including sequence pre-visualisation, blue and green screen shooting, face and body motion capture, compositing of image elements and digital rotoscoping, non-linear editing and sound mixing." See Lisa Purse, *Digital Imaging in Popular Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 2.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Stephen Prince, *Digital Visual Effects in Cinema: The Seduction of Reality* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012), p. 9.

technologies, Hadjioannou conveys a difference of change rather than elimination: "The transition from the one to the other is a matter of oscillating, in other words, between the two settings and paying attention to what takes place in every new moment of their interactive reverberations."[162] During this period of technological transition it is not the case that celluloid and analogic formats have become obsolete, rather this shift has raised the significant issue of technological mortality.[163] As digital filmmaking practices have become more stable, widespread and accepted, celluloid has rapidly been overtaken as the primary medium of moving images over the last decade.

Several critics have cited the sense of loss that has accompanied this technological progression, with Rosalind Krauss describing it as an "ever rapid slide into obsolescence."[164] However, it is also important to recognise the subliminal nature of this transition for mainstream audiences; early on in this phase, John Belton noted that the "potential for a totally digital cinema—digital production, post-production, distribution, and exhibition—caught the attention and imagination of the media" but had little impact on the majority audience's moviegoing experience.[165] Similarly, in *Digital Visual Effects in Cinema* Prince suggests that photographic models of cinema— those that attribute the medium's properties to a base in photography—are

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[162] Markos Hadjioannou, *From Light to Byte: Towards an Ethics of Digital Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), p. 217.

[163] However, the move to digital filmmaking is more than a shift from analogue to digital. Quoting cinematographer John Seitz, David Bordwell notes: "Motion picture photography of the silent era was an optical and chemical business. The addition of sound changed it to more of an electrical business" (see Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* [London: Routledge, 1985], p. 287). The emergence of digital filmmaking practices—digital cameras, sound recording, visual effects, and editing—has transformed the industry into a data business, albeit one that still depends on optical and electrical instruments.

[164] Rosalind E. Krauss, *Perpetual Inventory* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2011), p. 86

[165] John Belton, 'Digital Cinema: A False Revolution', *October* 100 (2002), p. 103.

insufficient to account for the changing narrative modes of cinema and its amalgamation of different image types and categories. Visual effects have become an increasingly central feature of modern cinema, to the extent that they are now essential to its operation as a narrative medium: "Visual effects can be used to create spectacle, but more often they work in subtle, nonspectacular ways."[166] Visual effects have thus become increasingly compatible with cinematic realism, providing filmmakers with new avenues towards integrated, subliminal realist effects. So, despite the substantial influence digital technologies have had on production, aesthetic, industrial and exhibition levels, the narrative modes with which audiences are presented continue to be both traditional and familiar.

Returning to Bazin and the ontological debate, in his seminal essay 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', he maintains that photography creates a dramatic artistic shift as it finally satisfies the desire for reproduction of life in image not simply as accurate but as real as life itself.[167] For Bazin, the photographic image is uniquely credible because it retains a spatial wholeness resulting from its photochemical link to the real—what actually existed before the camera lens—that resembles the physical relationship between finger and fingerprint. The image is perceived as real rather than merely resembling reality, a factual impression of an originating object on its reproduction that is based on photographic technologies and the indexical nature of photochemical techniques. In contrast, Christian Metz focuses on the image as a

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[166] Prince, *Digital Visual Effects in Cinema*, p. 2. By way of example, he notes: "the title character of *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (2008) is a visual effect as well as a live actor's performance. The same is true of the Na'vi *Avatar* (2009). Virtual environments found in *Changeling* (2008), *Master and Commander* (2003) and *Zodiac* (2007) are indistinguishable from real locations" (ibid., p. 3).

[167] André Bazin, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', in *What Is Cinema?* Volume 1, p. 13. In 'The Evolution of the Language of Cinema' Bazin conceives of an aesthetics of cinema true to real life, noting how cinema has historically developed strategies for adding external motives to filmic realism.

fictive construction that is dependent on the viewer's imagination and the unreal appearance of the real world.[168] Similarly, Jean-Louis Baudry links the cinematic apparatus with the dominant ideology to which the spectator is subjected.[169] Like Bazin, Roland Barthes draws attention to the potential of photography's causal structure; in *Camera Lucida* he describes the photograph as a pointer to a specific moment of reality, emphasising what had previously taken place as an image of "that-has-been."[170] Correspondingly, Stanley Cavell views the ontological power of cinema as the realisation of reality as an actuality that is spatially concurrent yet temporally distanced.[171] This affirms Barthes' notion of a temporal dissonance between image and reality, yet Cavell finds greater assurance in the depiction of reality despite spectatorial isolation from it. Through the work of Barthes and Bazin, indexicality both reveals the world and implicates the viewer in the perception of a filmed world; celluloid bears the image of reality in the physical traces of luminous reflections, thereby maintaining a direct imprint of a past occurrence.

John Belton argues that digital images threaten "our traditional understanding of the photographic image as homogenous, as a whole constituted by the frame that groups its contents together."[172] This is due to both a greater level of image manipulation and

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[168] See Christian Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier' (excerpts) in Philip Rosen (ed.), *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 244-278.

[169] See Jean-Louis Baudry, 'Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus'.

[170] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, translated by Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 77. Originally published as *La Chambre Claire: Note sur la photographie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980).

[171] Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 40-41.

[172] John Belton, 'Painting by the Numbers: The Digital Intermediate', *Film Quarterly* 61:3 (Spring 2008), p. 59.

the increased invisibility of such practices.[173]   Correspondingly, Prince notes that

"photography's change from a chemical medium to a digital one seemed to change its

ontological status and its relation to viewers,"[174] in part due to the idea that digital

images are more easily manipulable and therefore lose their status as credible markers

of truth. For Steven Shaviro, "Digital photography is no longer mimetic," and in this

era of digital manipulation "photographic images themselves are no longer objective in

Bazin's sense. They can no longer carry their own self evidence."[175] Digital filmmaking

may raise further questions concerning realism and authenticity, but in all cases this is

an impression of realism in terms of "what is *accepted* as real" within the parameters

of a film.[176] In 'What's the Point of an Index? or, Faking Photographs', Tom Gunning

refutes the opposition of the digital to indexicality, maintaining that the truth claim of

photography neglects the fact that celluloid film can also be transformed in ways that

devalue causality.[177]   Processes such as optical printing, matting, retouching, lens

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[173] With regard to the discourse surrounding the indexicality of the digital image that focuses on the differences between image capture/production on film and digitally, Bill Nichols encapsulates the abstract conceptuality (as opposed to physical substantiality) of the digital in saying: "The [memory/sensor] chip is pure surface, pure simulation of thought" (Bill Nichols, 'The Work of Culture in the Age of Cybernetic Systems', *Screen* 29:1 [Winter 1988], p. 33). What he suggests here is that digital capture is able to create whole images out of both the existent and non-existent. Digital images can be manipulated and reshaped to the extent that it challenges the indexicality of the image itself, thus being of theoretical as well as descriptive importance.

[174] Prince, *Digital Visual Effects in Cinema*, pp. 148-149. In 'True Lies: Perceptual Realism, Digital Images, and Film Theory', Stephen Prince had earlier argued that digital effects raise new issues about realism and the photographic image because digitally composed images challenge the ontology of indexical photographs. See Stephen Prince, 'True Lies: Perceptual Realism, Digital Images, and Film Theory', *Film Quarterly* 49:3 (Spring 1996), pp. 27-37. Available at: http://fdm.ucsc.edu/~landrews/film178w09/Film_178_THE_RECONSTRUCTED_IMAGE_files/True%20Lies-%20Perceptual%20Realism.pdf, accessed 29/10/13. Although he identifies CG images as "falsified correspondences," Prince also believes that the validity of their perceptual information can grant "a remarkable degree of photographic realism" (ibid., p. 34).

[175] Steven Shaviro, 'Emotion Capture: Affect in Digital Film', *Projections* 1:2 (Winter 2007), p. 39.

[176] Edward Buscombe, 'Sound and Colour' in Bill Nichols (ed.), *Movies and Methods* Volume II (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 88. As Philip Rosen has also points out, "Accounts of the digital gravitate toward a postulate of radical change in arenas of representation, discourse, culture, and sometimes even society as a whole" (Rosen, *Change Mummified*, p. 303).

[177] Tom Gunning, 'What's the Point of an Index? or, Faking Photographs', *Nordicom Review* 5:1/2 [Online] (September 2004), pp. 39-49. Available at: http://www.nordicom.gu.se/common/publ_pdf/134_039-050.pdf, accessed 29/10/13.

choices, the addition of filters, exposure times and the use of particular chemicals (such as bleach-bypass) emphasise the degree of subjective manipulation that has long been associated with celluloid practices predating "digital" techniques such as colour grading, rotoscoping, greenscreen and CGI.[178]

However, this debate regarding the indexicality of the photographic image versus the "untrustworthiness" of the digital one (Manovich, for example, contends that cinema "is no longer an indexical media technology"[179]) is both a matter of perception and involves a consideration of how "truthful" the photographic image is. Gunning has further argued that the concept of indexicality has reached "the limits of its usefulness in the theory of photography, film and new media,"[180] and is therefore of limited value when considering cinematic realism. This notion of indexicality is further undermined when one acknowledges that cinema is a combination of image types rather than presenting a singular form, and is therefore not solely a photographic medium; as Noël Carroll points out, "Film is not one medium, but many media."[181] Prince, too, notes that the argument that digital undermines the photochemical integrity of cinema becomes moot when one concedes that moving images are not a photograph: "Bazin's claims about the nature of photographic truth do not easily generalize to a medium

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[178] Lisa Purse reiterates this stance, noting: "the indexical connection between what we see on the screen and what was placed in front of the camera has been problematised since the dawn of cinema by practical effects, trick photography, and mainstream cinema's various other tools of illusion" (Purse, *Digital Imaging in Popular Cinema*, p. 5). Citing the rich tradition of darkroom practices and composite photographs (most notably the deep-focus effects in *Citizen Kane* (1941) that were achieved using mattes and optical printing), Prince claims that these practices "are not qualitatively different from anything that may be accomplished digitally" (Stephen Prince, *Digital Visual Effects in Cinema*, p. 79).

[179] Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, p. 295. In 'What Is Digital Cinema?' Manovich identifies a key principle of digital filmmaking: "Once live action footage is digitized (or directly recorded in a digital format), it loses its privileged indexical relationship to pro-filmic reality" (Lev Manovich, 'What Is Digital Cinema?'. *Manovich.net* [Online], 1995. Available at: http://www.manovich.net/TEXT/digital-cinema.html, accessed 14/06/12).

[180] Tom Gunning, 'Moving Away from the Index: Cinema and the Impression of Reality', *differences* 18:1 (2007), p. 30.

[181] Noël Carroll, *Engaging the Moving Image* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 8.

that assembles an array of ever-changing images in order to provoke motion perception."[182]   Digital imaging, therefore, is the very same impersonation of indexicality performed by photochemical cinema through optical and practical effects, merely enacted through a different medium. Digital images are said to lack indexical value, but this claim becomes untenable when one acknowledges that the indexical and the digital are not fixed values but are both fluid and hybrid in nature. For Purse, it seems "less a technically robust distinction than a polemical one founded on the idealisation of its two opposing terms,"[183] while Hadjioannou questions why celluloid's indexicality is necessarily linked to a quality of authenticity when its images contain elements that intervene in the directness of causality: "the ontological question conjured up by the relation between celluloid images and digital renditions is a matter of evaluating *how* each technology makes its associations to the world possible."[184] Although this subject is not expressly relevant to the issues of this thesis, it is important to acknowledge these arguments so that we can move beyond them to frame the impact of digital technologies in broader terms by considering how they have affected and challenged contemporary historical cinema.

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[182] Prince, *Digital Visual Effects in Cinema*, p. 79.

[183] Purse, *Digital Imaging in Popular Culture*, p. 6. See also Rosen, *Change Mummified*, p. 302.

[184] Hadjioannou, *From Light to Byte*, pp. 212-213.

<u>Conclusion</u>

This literature review has negotiated a pathway through several important historical, historiographical and technological issues, and these central themes engage with historical cinema in a range of ideological, ontological and representational terms. They tangentially touch upon the relationship between film and history, performing the vital functions of identifying and explicating particular facets of the field. Having established the concept of history as both an ideological construct and narrative form that is constantly re-worked and re-ordered, we can begin to examine how the historical film operates within similar constraints, furthering the subjective, multi-perspectival nature of the discipline. My aim is to further illuminate a specific field of historical cinema as the medium edges ever closer to complete digital transformation, illustrating the expressive potential of historical forms within the genre. Moving beyond Rosenstone's conception of the New History film as challenging traditional manifestations of the past encourages the consideration of more specific formal, aesthetic and technological elements in the creation of historical texts. Given the changing landscape of modern cinema, digital filmmaking has the potential to reflect and memorialise the past in new and significant ways.

Addressing many of the issues raised here, I will analyse a number of films to reveal the divergent strategies with which historical events have been framed, conceptualised and articulated. This work necessarily forgoes extended discussion of the ontological and ideological aspects of digital filmmaking mentioned above, allowing for a focus on historical narratives and aesthetics. The adoption of particular technologies and aesthetic strategies offers fresh opportunities for creative

experimentation and expression, and the diversity and complexity of more recent modes of historical reassessment can be understood in light of their artistic and cultural contexts. By examining their integration within a particular genre, this thesis evaluates how these representations engage with both the recent and distant pasts and impact on societal experiences of history. This furthers the notion that the historical film articulates ever-evolving levels of engagement with the past, informing new cinematic texts as much as history itself.

Chapter One: Subjectivity and Film Style in the Historical Epic

Throughout this thesis I examine how various representational strategies allow for temporally-specific engagements, reflecting the development of new ways in which audiences access and interact with history through historical or biographical narratives. Using these analyses, I illustrate how contemporary historical cinema constructs different ways of experiencing the past through its historical figures, with digital aesthetics lending qualities of presentness and propinquity to past events. In this chapter I wish to explore the potential of modern filmmaking practices to represent the historical past and to reconsider the role that style has in the construction of historical meaning. The chapter introduces some of the issues in the heavily debated field of digital cinema, such as filmmaking practices, aesthetics, and digital editing. Drawing contrasts between *Che*, which was filmed digitally, and *The New World*, shot on film but edited digitally, I argue that the contemporary historical film provides a new range of techniques and approaches that revise themes and motifs typically associated with historical cinema. These divergent approaches illustrate specific expressions of perspective to convey the experience of historical events: in *Che* the protagonist is distanced by presenting the processes and activities of revolution objectively; *The New World* engages more subjectively with the past through its historical figures to communicate the sensory qualities of personal historical experience.

Reading the contemporary historical film alongside the work of Paul Ricœur, Robert Rosenstone and Robert Burgoyne, I draw attention to the ways that modern historical

cinema foregrounds the subjective experience of past events as a form of historical agency, emphasising particular forms of historical re-enactment. Traditionally, historical cinema has been understood as playing an important role in shaping cultural understandings of the past, apparent in its tendency to arouse public controversy. For Burgoyne, the historical film is recognised for "its ability to establish an emotional connection to the past, a connection that can awaken a powerful sense of national belonging or a probing sense of national self-scrutiny."[185] In order to understand these forms of historical representation and interpretation within broader filmmaking contexts across cultural, ethnic and geographic boundaries, we need to move away from the position that cinema merely allows us to view history. For instance, Tony Barta states: "Watching a costume drama or a historical documentary we want the screen to be a window on the past."[186] We need to consider how we can move beyond this, how we experience and relate more directly to the history in front of us with involvement as opposed to passive spectatorship.

This chapter also explores the way modern historical narratives have been shaped by a range of formal and stylistic devices, and how this impacts on the presentation of the past. Burgoyne notes that, while not a self-contained genre, "the historical film has developed several different variants, branching off into distinct subtypes such as the war film, the epic, the biographical film, the topical film, and evolving new, contemporary forms such as the metahistorical film."[187] The films studied in this chapter have a basis in a documented past, allowing them to be interpreted as a

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[185] Robert Burgoyne, *The Hollywood Historical Film* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), pp. 1-2.
[186] Barta, *Screening the Past*, p. 2.
[187] Burgoyne, *The Hollywood Historical Film*, p. 4.

variant of the historical film that employs a range of contemporary film techniques and technologies to construct a re-visioning of the past. These films demonstrate how the historical past is re-created, re-enacted and re-visioned through new aesthetic and representational strategies over the recent period of technological change. As discussed earlier, the historical film goes beyond simple, static concepts of genre, and its variety and scope in transnational and global film cultures makes it important for contemporary study. Among several questions considered here is the link between historical representation and the production practices that relate to digital technologies.

This chapter introduces some issues and concepts of digital filmmaking and digital media forms, and illustrates their impact on contemporary historical narratives. This includes examining how digital filmmaking practices have been applied to the historical film for aesthetic, thematic, and narrative purposes. By considering the emphasis on visual composition and the attempts to give a sense of historical perspective, the digital can be viewed as adding further forms of stylistic expression as well as having the potential to involve viewers more directly with figures and events of the past.

Writers such as Kirsten Moana Thompson, Shilo T. McClean, and Sheldon Hall & Steve Neale have examined the growth of CGI and its impact on the historical film.[188]

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[188] Kirsten Moana Thompson, '"Phillip never saw Babylon": 360-degree vision and the historical epic in the digital era', in Robert Burgoyne (ed.), *The Epic Film in World Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 39-62; Shilo T. McClean, *Digital Storytelling: The Narrative Power of Visual Effects in Film* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), pp. 76-85; Sheldon Hall and Steve Neale, *Epics, Spectacles, and Blockbusters: A Hollywood History* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2010), pp. 253-259. McClean makes a particular distinction between invisible and seamless effects, with seamless effects being "discernible if subjected to scrutiny and consideration," and therefore open to individual perception.

Thompson's work in particular considers the impact of CGI and digital enhancement on epic cinema, breaking down the pervasive role that visual effects have had in the transformation of the historical epic into three fields of intensification: spectacularity, monumentality, and immersiveness. She provides a detailed analysis of the digital techniques employed in *Troy* (2004) and *Alexander* (2004), demonstrating how they have been used to enhance historical spectacle, and tracks the advances in visual stylisation. Thompson also questions how digital special effects have transformed the aesthetics of the historical epic, noting how in *Gladiator* (2000), for instance, visual effects serve to "enhance verisimilitude and spectatorial immersion […] and to be functionally seamless, if not invisible."[189] While Hall & Neale note the impact of digital advancements within the areas of production, distribution and exhibition—such as CGI, video games, IMAX (and other large formats), 3D cinema, and the advent of DVD and Blu-ray—they make only brief mention of digital projection and do not consider the influence or expressive potential of other forms of digital filmmaking.[190] This is something I wish to rectify by addressing the manner by which historical cinema has been shaped in recent years by digital techniques.

Recent approaches to historical material in films such as *The New World*, *Public Enemies*, *Che* and *Robin Hood* (2010) have reflected these changes in film style. I propose that these new interpretations and treatments of history result from five key factors. Aside from *period authenticity*, which has always been a key element for creating historical verisimilitude through set design, period costuming, and hair and makeup, together with an inevitable amount of *dramatic license* in the adaption

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[189] Thompson, '"Phillip never saw Babylon"', p. 42.
[190] Hall and Neale, *Epics, Spectacles, and Blockbusters*, pp. 253-259.

historical narratives that must be taken into account, this study will focus on forms of *historical re-enactment*, and new *digital filming* and *digital editing* techniques.

Before I go on to consider how digital filmmaking practices have visible effects on the form and style of a historical film, it is also important to consider how aesthetics can be influenced by a range of other practical, non-technological techniques in the reassessment of a historical narrative. Several of these strategies can be identified in *The New World*, though, as I go on to discuss, the influence of digital editing and its impact on style represents a bridge to the issues surrounding modern technological practices raised in the second half of this chapter.

Terrence Malick's *The New World*

The New World demonstrates a dedication to historical verisimilitude in the realisation of its period diegesis, from shooting on location in Virginia and re-constructing authentic structures to revitalising an extinct native language. Furthermore, its approach to the foundation narrative of the discovery of America is distinct from traditional historical cinema in offering a disjointed narrative which derives from its discontinuous editing structure. Although the film is largely based on Captain John Smith's comprehensive (though obviously biased) account of the establishment of Jamestown, the *Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles* (first published in 1624), Malick's screenplay presents its narrative in such a way as to acknowledge both its historical context and its status as national origin story. Following the establishment of the Jamestown colony in Virginia by the English in 1607, the film concerns Smith's (Colin Farrell) experiences with the indigenous people

he encounters on his expeditions. After he is saved from execution by the chieftain's daughter, Pocahontas (Q'orianka Kilcher), they fall in love, but Smith returns to Jamestown and eventually leaves in search of the Northwest Passage. Pocahontas, informed that Smith has died at sea, marries John Rolfe (Christian Bale), with whom she has a child, and she leaves for England where she dies due to illness.

Robert Burgoyne classifies *The New World* as a metahistorical film, together with such films as *JFK* (1991), *Courage Under Fire* (1996) and *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006), a type of film that interrogates the traditional representation of history.[191] This is similar to Robert Rosenstone's concept of "revisioning" history in which films reject notions of historical realism in favour of "expressive modes of representation that expand the vocabulary of the historian."[192] Rosenstone further states that "film is not history in our traditional sense, but it is a kind of history nonetheless […] Film has given us tools to see reality in a new way – including the realities of a past which has long since vanished from our sight."[193] While he acknowledges the fact that some historical films are not built on documentary evidence and therefore may compromise the use of the term "historical", Rosenstone believes the notions of "historical thinking" and "historical understanding" are still pertinent when dealing with historical issues, contexts and interpretations.

As with the other films that are the subject of this study, *The New World* comments on and refracts issues outside of its diegesis while simultaneously engaging with particular generic tropes and employing a divergent array of aesthetic techniques and

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[191] Burgoyne, *The Hollywood Historical Film*, p. 5.
[192] Rosenstone, Introduction to *Revisioning History*, pp. 3-13.
[193] Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, p. 158.

representational strategies. *The New World* is a radical departure from the realist style of historical narration that has dominated the Pocahontas story,[194] presenting instead a history told through subjective voiceovers, unconventional camera movements and perspectives, and disjunctive, non-continuity editing. In this way, the film represents the revision of a specific interpretation of the past, albeit a past enshrouded in myth. *The New World* seems to exemplify Burgoyne's concept of the metahistorical film as "a work that starts by questioning the dominant understanding of a particular event, and that challenges the way the history of that event has been written and disseminated."[195] Much like Burgoyne's analysis of *JFK*, *The New World* can be seen to present a "counter-myth" to the myth of the discovery of America and the Smith-Pocahontas romance. This form of historical practice is more ambiguous and less focused on defining one version of the past, presenting multiple perspectives and shifting subjective agency. However, in the case of *The New World*, the inaccessibility of historical truth derives from the unreliability of Smith's personal accounts and the remoteness of the period.

In charting the relationship between 17th century English explorer Smith and Pocahontas, a young Native American princess, the film also "chronicles their deepening intimacy in the context of Jamestown's gradual evolution from a frontier outpost to a burgeoning North American town."[196] The central romantic relationship and the film's battle scenes are not what one would expect, with very little dialogue,

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[194] Films such as *Pocahontas and John Smith* (1924), *Captain John Smith and Pocahontas* (1953) and *Pocahontas: The Legend* (1995) preceded Disney's 1995 animated historical fantasy, *Pocahontas*.
[195] Burgoyne, *The Hollywood Historical Film*, p. 125. However, it is questionable as to exactly how familiar the Pocahontas story is, therefore undermining this notion of "dominant understanding."
[196] David Sterritt, 'Film, Philosophy, and Terrence Malick's New World', <u>Undercurrent</u> [Online], February 2006. Available at: http://www.fipresci.org/undercurrent/issue_0206/sterritt_malick.htm, accessed 25/09/13.

an elliptical, peripatetic structure, and a dearth of dramatic climaxes. The film downplays Smith's heroic qualities and focuses more on the spiritual experiences of Pocahontas, concentrating on her encounters with nature (the Mother spirit), her relationships with Smith and Rolfe, and her visit to England where she meets King James (Jonathan Pryce), and later dies. While the film was carefully researched in terms of both historical events and ethnographic detail, this is not where its emphasis lies; instead, it focuses on the romantic, transformative and transcendental experiences of Smith and Pocahontas. This is a sensual experience, one of touch, taste and smell in the intimate interactions between Smith and Pocahontas, and, as in Malick's previous work, *The New World* demonstrates a unique and resonant layering of image, word, sound and music.

Having started work on the screenplay in the 1970s, Malick emphasises both the romantic and historical sides of this narrative, demonstrating a meticulous attention to detail in the mise-en-scène, period costuming and dialogue, and Native American heritage. A selective blending of history and popular lore, the film diverges from available historical evidence to explore Malick's own philosophical, existential and transcendental themes, and to experience this period of history. Malick seems attuned to the world of nature, the pure, unblemished America upon whose shores the Europeans had landed, and how the human characters interact with it, and with each other in these environments. This backdrop allows Malick to explore the implications of a clash of cultures between the Native Americans and the European post-Enlightenment colonialists, the contrast between those at harmony with nature and those who seek to exploit it. David Sterritt sees this as something more than

merely examining these contradictions regarding nature, viewing it as a conflict explored "within the very fabric of [the] film, testing whether cinema itself can function as an organic part of the natural world."[197] In doing so, Malick is questioning the organic ability of film to capture and record reality—a domination of nature—rather than co-existing harmoniously with it.[198] This concept of the domination of nature is a recurring theme in Malick's work, and is framed in this chapter in relation to issues of representation and transcendentalism.

Contemporary cinema, for the most part, steers clear of distancing or decentreing practices that stand in opposition to the ideal of re-enactment. *The New World*, however, engages in a process of making the past remote from the present and repudiates the American ethnocentrism implicit in the traditional version of the historicising of its discovery. As Paul Ricœur asks, "why would the effect of strangeness not go so far as to make us feel we are in a foreign, unknown land?"[199] This sense of unfamiliarity seems to be Malick's intention in forming a history that places its viewers at a remove and presents this world as both "other" and "new". This accentuates the differences and temporal distance between the past and the present, while allowing for allegorical readings of events concerning colonialism, civilisation and environmental issues. For Ricœur, the process of detemporalisation results in events appearing neither near to us nor far away from us: "In this way the epistemology of the individual can appear to eclipse the ontology of the past."[200]

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[197] Ibid.

[198] This is related to André Bazin's work from the 1940s, in which he argued that material objects are physically linked with their photographed images by the particles of light that travel between them when a picture is taken.

[199] Paul Ricœur, *The Reality of the Historical Past* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1984), p. 16.

[200] Ibid., p. 19.

Voiceover and historical subjectivity in *The New World*

In their study of voiceover in Malick's *The Thin Red Line* (1998), Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit argue that the film asks us "to do little more than *to let the world be*,"[201] but in order to do so the subject must be divested of its subjectivity, replicating "the world as an accretion to consciousness, and a look, ceaselessly receptive to the world."[202] While *The New World* similarly proposes viewing the natural world as a "community of all being," it grants subjectivity to its characters, accentuating both their (cultural/social) differences and (human/emotional) similarities. Smith and Pocahontas may be asking similar existential, metaphysical and spiritual questions— "Mother. Where do you live?"; "Who are you… who urge me ever on"—but each is granted their own voice and form from which a specific perspective is conveyed. The presentation of the film is as a stream-of-consciousness narrative, a highly philosophical work in its Heideggerian existential questioning and phenomenological exploration.[203]

This section examines the interiority of the historical narrative, one that reveals different levels of personal experience and acknowledges shifting perspectives. The nature of internal experience is what emerges through narration, and as with *The Thin*

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[201] Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Forms of Being: Cinema, Aesthetics, Subjectivity* (London: BFI, 2004), p. 164.

[202] Ibid., p. 165.

[203] For more on the philosophical exegesis of Malick's work, see David Davies, 'Terrence Malick', in Paisley Livingston and Carl Plantinga (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 570-572, and John Rhym, 'The Paradigmatic Shift in the Critical Reception of Terrence Malick's Badlands and the Emergence of a Heideggerian Cinema', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 27 (2010), pp. 255-266. Richard Neer believes that Malick's own distinction between "the totality of things" and "that in the terms of which we understand them" in the introduction to his translation of Heidegger's *The Essence of Reason*, might clarify the "relation of narrative thematics to cinematic technique" in *The New World*. See Terrence Malick, 'Translator's introduction', in Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Reasons: A Bilingual Edition, Incorporating the German Text of Vom Wesen des Grundes*, translated by Terrence Malick (Evanston: Northwestern, 1969), pp. xiv-xv.

Red Line and *The Tree of Life* (2011), films that also have multiple narrators, this imbues the film with transcendental potency.[204] Gilberto Perez notes that "no other filmmaker has been so devoted to the device. [...] Voiceover is the device he uses to embroider events with reflection and also to fill in narrative gaps, releasing the images from their usual subordination to the story so that they can flourish in splendid autonomy."[205] While *The New World* lacks the inchoate notes of the other young, often naïve narrators of his other films, its voiceovers provide a constant—though incomplete—commentary which is not tied to any form of temporal timeline. It takes the initial perspective of Pocahontas and layers it with the narration of John Smith and, later, John Rolfe. While often seen to be ponderous and introspective, multiple narration serves the purpose of revealing the thoughts and feelings of characters without expressing them through dialogue. Malick's frequent employment of voiceover narration has a philosophical rather than psychological purpose: he finds greater power in the meditative dimensions of the unspoken than in dramatic vocal exchanges. In *The New World*, these intricate internal monologues are rambling, truthful and extensive.

In his essay, 'The Colombian Exchange: Pocahontas and *The New World*', Robert Burgoyne argues that the film reorients the foundational myth of the Jamestown settlement in a way that "effectively defamiliarizes the viewer's experience of place,

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[204] Malick frequently employs narration, but *Badlands* (1973) and *Days of Heaven* (1978) are narrated by a single protagonist, Holly (Sissy Spacek) in the former and Linda (Linda Manz) in the latter, who is a more passive observer of events. *The Thin Red Line* is largely narrated by Private Witt (Jim Caviezel) but also features narration by Private Bell (Ben Chaplin), Lieutenant Colonel Gordon Tall (Nick Nolte) and Private Train (John Dee Smith).
[205] Gilberto Perez, 'How We Remember', *London Review of Books* (12 September 2013), p. 25.

history, and identity."[206]   Combining the mythological elements of the Smith-Pocahontas romance with historically documented material of the European discovery of the Americas is understood by Burgoyne as a form of historical "revisioning". He argues that the film "portrays history both in terms of the 'inside' and in terms of the 'otherness' of historical events."[207] This notion of the "inside" is a reflection of the interiority of the characters, expressed through voiceover. The sense of "otherness", on the other hand, is evident in the film's unfamiliar setting of the past that distorts this perception of the interior, with the historical "realities" obfuscating the development of the "inside" voice. Burgoyne sees these two different approaches—close re-enactment combined with techniques of defamiliarisation—as comparable to Ricœur's description of historiography under the sign of the "same" and under the sign of the "other".[208]

Malick provides a subjective view of these historical events that prompts a different connection to the contemporary world.   The voiceovers afford, for instance, a balanced sense of Smith's interpretation of the natives and Pocahontas' understanding of the colonists.   Viewing the Native community, Smith observes, "They have no jealousy, no sense of possession. Real, what I thought a dream." While expressing his personal experience of encountering an unknown, this passage also demonstrates how his encounter appears to him as a new reality. But the voice of Pocahontas is more

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[206] Robert Burgoyne, *Film Nation: Hollywood Looks at U.S. History* (Minneapolis and London, 2010), p. 121.

[207] Ibid., p. 122.

[208] Regarding the film desire for verisimilitude, Burgoyne cites the vivid portrayal of otherness through face and body painting, the bizarre, primal gestures, and the transference of the native culture's animistic superstitions. Concurrently, through the focalised form of Pocahontas, we see the odd customs and costumes of the colonists, and their destructive attitude towards nature for the sake of creating civilisation.

expressive and, perhaps, more central in steering the film away from the Eurocentric perspective that traditionally characterises this narrative by providing a native voice. Her internal monologue—conducted in English—both presents the vastness of the cultural differences from her perspective and relates her strong connection with nature. She intones at the film's opening, "Come, spirit. Help us sing the story of our land. You are our mother; we, your field of corn. We rise from the soul of you." While it could be argued that the use of voiceover represents a divergence from historical record, the film uses it to emphasise cultural differences and uncertainties, posing an interpretation that is less reliant on merely presenting historical events.

In his rigorous analysis of the film, Richard Neer documents that much of the dialogue in the film comes from primary source material from the 17th century, such as combining passages from Smith's own *Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England and the Southern Isles* with lines from the work of Gerrard Winstanley, an English religious reformer and political activist. The script also alludes to works by Thomas Campion, Hart Crane, Charles Dickens, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Michel de Montaigne, Vachel Lindsay, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Sappho, Virgil, Walt Whitman, and even the Brothers Grimm.[209] The purpose of these literary (rather than historical) allusions seems to be to invoke a form of vernacular or rhetorical authenticity rather than a historical one. There is also significance in the fact that the characters are not

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[209] Richard Neer, 'Terrence Malick's New World', *Nonsite* 2 [Online], 12 June 2011. Available at: http://nonsite.org/issues/issue-2/terrence-malicks-new-world, accessed 25/09/13. Specifically, the sources of these lines in the film are: Thomas Campion, 'What Is a Day?'; Hart Crane, 'The Bridge'; Dickens, *David Copperfield*; Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*; Lindsay, 'Our Mother Pocahontas'; Melville, *White Jacket*; Montaigne, 'Of Cannibals'; Rousseau, *The Social Contract*; Sappho, 31 *PLF*; Virgil, *Aeneid*; Whitman, 'One Hour to Madness and Joy'; The Brothers Grimm, 'The Frog-King, or Iron Henry'. In addition, the film alludes to the plot of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (The Ring of the Nibelung), with Smith playing Siegmund to Pocahontas' Brunnhilde, as well as using music of the first of these operas, *Das Rheingold*.

speaking their own words, with these invocations and dialogues having an expressive rather than historical purpose. As viewers, we are neither expected to recognise the allusions nor align them with their original context or intention, but they inflect scenes and exchanges with a sense of the historical and the profound even if they have little bearing on the plot. Neer reads this as rendering visible the film's status as a costume drama, "with the requisite heartthrob, ingénue, battles, escapes, pageantry, tacky costumes, swelling Germanic music and inconsistent accents."[210] However, as I examine later in this chapter, the film does much to contradict traditional elements of the historical epic (more so than the costume drama) in terms of camerawork and editing practices. While I find it hard to agree with Neer's notion that the borrowing of language and verse acknowledge the conditions of the film's genre, I refute his claim that the film "gives language priority over psychology and expression,"[211] instead seeing this concern with language and literary allusion as a form of expression and psychological insight.

As with its practice in documentaries such as *In the Year of the Pig* (1968) and *The Thin Blue Line* (1988), voiceover commentary can both reinforce and undercut what is depicted onscreen. Smith's first interior monologue observes: "We will make a fresh start; nature's bounty is bestowed on all. Here there is no need to grow poor. No cause but one's labour." This statement is immediately challenged as the colonists are depicted struggling in this new environment, with their crops having failed and their stores having spoiled. The subtle stream of contradictions and inconsistencies throughout Smith's voiceover seems to criticise both his interpretation of events

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[210] Neer, 'Terrence Malick's New World'.
[211] Ibid.

(these observations deriving from his journals) and his role as narrator more generally.[212] While his idealistic accounts of his first encounters in Virginia are incommensurate with the harsh realities of events, they do express the awe and wonder he experiences in his relationship with Pocahontas. As Burgoyne notes, their elegiac love scenes are "set in a world that is devoid of strife and hardship, a mythical world of perfect beauty."[213] His accounts also convey the sensationalistic rhetoric of an adventurer, an explorer and chronicler of new territories. Malick's criticism of Smith's history of events is established through these contradictions, as well as shaping them to coincide with his thematic concerns regarding the mythological interracial romance.

In his monograph on *The Thin Red Line*, Michel Chion introduces the notion of "paradisiacal freedom", of moving through three dimensions with no physical or cultural boundaries to restrict the characters.[214] This idea of leading characters into unmarked, unknown spaces within a historical context applies similarly in *The New World*. Chion finds this theme to be both positive and negative: the film's voiceovers are "islands of words" that "do not mingle with the surrounding air, as though they were enclosed in the 'moving box' that is the human soul," yet they also constitute a single voice that offers "the modulated meditations of a single collective consciousness."[215] As Perez notes, "Voiceover, which is normally used to take us inside

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[212] Another example is a scene in which the colonists are shown stealing food and drink; Smith intones, "We shall build a commonwealth. Hard work and self-reliance our virtues." In the following scene, an Indian, having no concept of ownership, is shot and killed as he takes a hatchet from the colonists' camp. This could be read as a cynical understanding of the American Dream, one built on values that don't apply to those who previously occupied the land.

[213] Burgoyne, *Film Nation*, p. 130.

[214] Michel Chion, *The Thin Red Line* (London: BFI, 2004), p.50.

[215] Ibid., pp. 55 and 57.

a character's head, is here a way of connecting one character with another."[216] The

soldiers' vocalisations proffer a sense of connection between the men through the

collectivity of their inner voices. In *The New World*, this collectivism is even more

apparent in the insularity of the consummation of its star-cross'd lovers.

Chion states that the "voiceover or inner voice that is 'out of line', whose relationship

to the course of the narrative is non-linear, is the most striking and noted feature of

Malick's cinema from *Badlands* on."[217] He notes the shift in his work from a single

female voice to a collection of male ones, and his subsequent films have further

expanded to incorporate multiple voiceovers as internalised expressions of thought.[218]

However, while Malick's films are largely set in the past, the narrative of *The New

World* is the most explicitly historicised.[219] This leads us to consider how voiceover

works to provide a sense of historical subjectivity. For instance, tense can be

provocative in expressing how the past is being viewed: voiceover in the present tense

conveys a sense of timelessness that may operate with or against a historicised

narrative; the past tense could reflect a nostalgia for the past by emphasising the act

of remembering.

Chion also notes how multiple inner voices have the potential to isolate the characters

from each other "because they possess them at different times."[220] In *The New World*,

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[216] Perez, 'How We Remember', p. 26.
[217] Chion, *The Thin Red Line*, p. 53.
[218] For instance, *The Tree of Life* features the voiceovers of Jack (Sean Penn), Young Jack (Hunter McCracken) and Mrs. O'Brien (Jessica Chastain), while *To the Wonder* (2013) features those of the characters Marina (Olga Kurylenko), Neil (Ben Affleck), and Father Quintana (Javier Bardem), alongside the intersecting narrations of Smith, Pocahontas and Rolfe in *The New World*.
[219] This is more so than *The Thin Red Line* in that the World War II context is an implicit part of the narrative, rather than *The New World*'s deliberate act of historicising the familiar Pocahontas myth.
[220] Chion, *The Thin Red Line*, p. 54.

voiceovers are contradictory both in terms of how their content differs from what is displayed onscreen, and regarding their rhetorical questioning that is not openly vocalised. Not only does this grant a few characters a subjective voice, albeit one that is often not complemented by the viewpoint of the camera, but it also reinforces the isolation of the characters. Chion states that "the voice of the interior monologue is not just an exchange between an individual consciousness, lost in the cosmos, and our own. It is also like a door that opens and closes on a dark interior."[221] Often, characters remain silent in their diegetic world, possessing no spoken voice, but their voiceover expresses their individual inner voice either as an immediate response or as a later reflection. The key distinction between the inner voices featured in *The Thin Red Line* and those of *The New World* is that "the feeling of a continuum between the voice that speaks aloud and the meditative inner voice"[222] is diminished in the latter.

The passing of the agency of vocal expression in *The New World* unites to form a single collective (historical) consciousness, one that amplifies their insularity in temporal terms. James Morrison observes that "Malick explores the ways history, legend and ideology combine to produce possibilities for a pluralistic 'worldview' – and to subvert them," conveying it as a form of historical consciousness that "is everywhere, underlying the film's most radiant idylls and shadowing its gentlest and most volatile expressions of awe."[223] The internal monologues come together to construct a larger

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[221] Ibid., p. 55.
[222] Ibid., p. 57.
[223] James Morrison, 'Making Worlds, Making Pictures: Terrence Malick's *The New World*' in Hannah Patterson (ed.), *The Cinema of Terrence Malick: Poetic Visions of America* (London & New York: Wallflower Press, 2007), p. 200.

negotiation of thought (what Chion likens to a shared reading[224]), albeit one of indirect responses that further emphasises the isolation of characters.

In his book *The Voice in Cinema*, Chion elaborates on voiceover's ability for ubiquity, panopticism, omniscience, and omnipotence. He refers to the "acousmêtre", a term "unearthed" by Pierre Shaeffer in the 1950s that denotes a sound that is heard without its cause or source being seen. He observes that the "interdiction against looking, which transforms the Master, God, or Spirit into an acousmatic voice, permeates a great number of religious traditions."[225] This is expressed in *The New World* most openly in Pocahontas' intoning of the mother spirit. Yet unlike Chion's figure of the acousmêtre, it is possible to connect the speaking voice to a face, and thus an agent or vocaliser (a material and localised body). This is despite the fact that we hear the voiceovers of Pocahontas, Smith and Rolfe before we hear them speak aloud. This idea of the disembodied voice is, of course, not unique to Malick, but in the case of Pocahontas she does not speak for a lengthy period of time and, when she does so, it is not in English. In turn, this creates a form of cognitive dissonance in knowing that the voice that emerges is true and belongs to a particular person, yet is not aligned with her existing linguistic capabilities.

Pocahontas remains a silent character until we *see* her speak, itself a form of verification that proves, in Chion's terms, that "de-acousmatization is incomplete, and the voice retains an aura of invulnerability and magical power."[226] It is comparable to

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[224] Chion, *The Thin Red Line*, p. 57.
[225] Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, edited and translated by Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 19.
[226] Ibid., p. 28.

hearing the internal monologue of a character who does not have the ability to speak. Perhaps there is even a neologism for this practice – could it be described as an analinguistic voiceover? If we are to take the film's first sequence as positioned chronologically before the arrival of the colonists, then Pocahontas' English voiceover lacks a linguistic origin as she does not learn the language until later, forcing the question of from what perspective the voiceover is located. Anne Latto notes that "as others in her tribe are speaking in their own language, we may question why her narration was not in her native tongue."[227] By way of response, Amy Taubin finds "the colonialist implication of making English the default language […] for Pocahontas' voice-overs" to be problematic.[228] There is an indeterminacy within the voiceover regarding its status, direction, and provenance: while Pocahontas' omniscient narration is in English, the moment at which it is conducted—and therefore the perspective from which it originates—remains ambiguous. However, this demonstrates both Malick's adherence to (and acceptance of) convention—English language being a standard convention of commercial cinema and voiceover in particular—and the importance he places on voice.

Thus the film charts Pocahontas' spiritual, emotional and intellectual journey, a search for meaning that is ultimately seen, through the nature of historical hindsight, to be overwhelmingly tragic. Following her marriage to Rolfe, her voyage to England allows her to discover her own "new world". The perspectival focus here is particularly significant, with Pocahontas experiencing the mannered, peculiarly English rituals in the court of King James. Her pleasure in the manicured lawns of the palatial estate is

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[227] Anne Latto, 'Innocents Abroad: The Young Woman's Voice in *Badlands* and *Days of Heaven*, with an Afterword on *The New World*', in Patterson (ed.), *The Cinema of Terrence Malick*, p. 99.
[228] Amy Taubin, 'Birth of a Nation', *Sight and Sound* 16:2 (February 2006), p. 44.

marked by its purity as she discovers her own truth in locating nature's spirit: "Mother, now I know where you live," she says in the film's closing moments. This echoes Smith's turn away from Pocahontas after she saves him from death at the hands of her father and they share a brief romantic moment; in that instance, Smith is limited by his ingenuousness and his colonialist impulses, later telling Pocahontas that what they experienced together in Virginia was not a dream but was instead "the only truth."

The central female voice of *The New World*, unlike the voiceovers of *Badlands* (1973) and *Days of Heaven* (1978), is contrasted with two male counterparts. Gender and age mark her out as an "innocent", and in the course of the film she is marginalised from both the European colonists (whence the two male voices originate) and from her tribe. Anne Latto focuses on this idea of an "innocent" voice, relating it to Henry James' *What Maisie Knew* in which the female child's voice is used "not in a first-person narrative but as his third-person centre of consciousness."[229] What is being verbalised—text, thought, afterthought—is ambiguous. Latto suspects, due to Pocahontas' naïveté, that she may be seen as a "fallible filter" as, "with greater access to her subjectivity, the spectator [begins] to align with her."[230] Her actions reflect shifting tensions but her voiceover fails to comment on them—why she saved Smith or helped the English, for instance. Thus Latto believes the film questions the nature of innocence by asking from whose perspective we judge it, but these voiceovers can only convey so much about experience and motivation.

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[229] Latto , 'Innocents Abroad', p. 88. This "innocent" voice is related to "the idea of the child's innate moral sense; marginality as a position from which to comment on the adult world; and the use of the colloquial idiom" (ibid.).

[230] Ibid., p. 99. The term "fallible filter" derives from Seymour Chatman, *Coming to Terms* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 149.

While Latto sees this development of an ironic relationship between voiceover and diegetic action as a subjective device that conveys a figure's point of view in spite of contradictory actualities, Neer believes that the "relation of world to voice is disjunctive, such that the former is the function of no subjectivity, even as the latter presses upon us particular ways of inhabiting that world. […] what we see is *not* how things appear to any character."[231] This may well be a way of acknowledging the perspectival and anecdotal qualities of relating historical events, as well as addressing the viewer's own subjectivity of experience.   Relating this to Chion's thesis, the spectatorial identification implicit in this practice requires that it be framed as a "*pivot of identification*," creating a sense of intimacy though "audio qualities of vocal *presence* and *definition*," as well as "dryness" (absence of reverb).[232] These criteria establish the voice as subjective, recognising it as a form of internal expression with which we identify.   This subjectivity is of greater significance due to the historical nature of the narrative: the voiceovers of *The New World* are not narrational projections for the benefit of the audience—for the purposes of exposition, for instance—but more like prayers, observations and intonations that reflect the experiences of the film's protagonists, rather than readings from a diary or journal. Moreover, Lloyd Michaels observes that the three speakers, though far more distinguishable than the multiple voices of *The Thin Red Line*, continue to "mediate and speculate rather than to narrate or explain."[233] The film's subjects are prone to poetic digressions, contributing to the dreamlike structure and its rapturous engagement with nature as opposed to a stringent historical focus.

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[231] Neer, 'Terrence Malick's New World'.

[232] Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, p. 51.

[233] Lloyd Michaels, *Terrence Malick* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), p. 80.

<u>Opening titles and themes of nature</u>

The film's opening displays an esoteric form of historical narration in which there is an ambiguity in the dissociated voice as to who is speaking and to what they are referring. The archetypical blending of image and sound, followed by the movement of the camera over the water (Figure 1.1), introduces the narrative and builds a visual language that emphasises historical ambiguity. The film's titles introduce the narration of history through animations of 17th century prints, showing ships crossing the Atlantic, battles between colonialists and natives, and the settlement of Virginia (Figures. 1.2-1.3). Richard Wagner's *Das Rheingold* plays, together with naturalistic diegetic sound, and the prints give way to an underwater camera shot (Figure 1.4).[234] Richard Neer finds significance in the fact that these credits, designed by Kyle Cooper, combine "an archaic form of mechanical reproduction […] with a futuristic one,"[235] narrating the settlement of Virginia but also strikingly matching the printed pictures with the filmed images, thus providing a specific historical context presented with immersive intent.

Robert Burgoyne states that "the formal and narrative conventions of the historical film adhere to a teleological structure in which the whole is visible in all of the parts, and where events and actions move in coordinated fashion toward a defined end point."[236] However, the maps featured here are markedly incomplete and in the process of being filled in, undefined by "end points" as they reveal spaces that have yet to be charted. In *Cartographic Cinema*, Tom Conley suggests that both films and

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[234] This visual technique is similar to that of *Black Robe* (1991), a film that details the experiences of Jesuit missionaries in 17th century Quebec.
[235] Neer, 'Terrence Malick's New World'.
[236] Burgoyne, *Film Nation*, p. 124.

maps have an orientational purpose: "A film, like a topographic projection, can be understood as an image that locates and patterns the imagination of it spectators. When it takes hold, a film encourages its public to think of the world in concert with its own articulation of space."[237] Both cinema and cartography have their own languages and draw from the same resources. Conley's guiding hypothesis concerns the paradoxical function of maps in film: "A map underlines what a film is and what it does, but it also opens a rift or brings into view a site where critical and productively interpretive relation with the film can begin."[238] The presence, and indeed animation, of maps here seems to orientate the viewer both historically and geographically by forcing the acknowledgement of our historical perspective, as well as our watching a film in the present. As Conley says, the use of maps also "tells us that we are not where it says it is taking place,"[239] underscoring Lloyd Michaels' view that the credits "suggest by metonymy the narrative's blending of factual detail with subjective interpretation,"[240] with this subjectivity being derived from the distancing of the past.

Regarding the ontology and historical function of cartography, Conley states: "a map in a movie begs and baits us to ponder the fact that *who we are* […] depends, whether or not our locus is fixed or moving, on often unconscious perceptions about *where* we come from and where we may be going."[241] This relates to how maps position the spectator geographically within the film and set out the limits of this geography for its protagonists. In this way, the use of maps in cinema relates to Conley's analogy with

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[237] Tom Conley, *Cartographic Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. 1.
[238] Ibid., p. 2.
[239] Ibid., p. 4.
[240] Michaels, *Terrence Malick*, p. 82. This also supports Vlada Petric's observation that "Malick's vision of history and geography is poetic rather than factual" in both its influences and expression. Vlada Petric, 'Days of Heaven', *Film Quarterly* 32.2 (Winter 1978-79), p. 40.
[241] Conley, *Cartographic Cinema*, p. 3.

the emergence of cartography in early modern print-culture. Maps in *The New World* could be seen to embrace the logistical virtues of mapping, aligning the opening with the subjectivity of the colonists by demonstrating both their purpose, as explorers, and their "superiority" in the ability to create and follow topographical charts. For Burgoyne, however, *The New World* presents a non-linear versioning of history that is not framed by narrative devices of agency and event, cause and effect: "Its innovative patterns of narration and focalization, of plot development and ellipsis, of temporal dilation and compression deviate from the straightforward dramatic unfolding typical of cinematic narrative."[242] The film's presentation of multiple perspectives conveys both the subjectivity of the narratives but also the manner in which they overlap and contradict one another.

The central contrasts are evident in the first glimpses of Pocahontas and Smith: the relationship between community and landscape and how this relates to personal freedom. This tension is expressed through the upward gestures of the two figures, Pocahontas embracing the sky while standing in an expansive, verdant field, and Smith imprisoned and chained in the enclosed bowels of his ship (Figures. 1.5 and 1.6). Pocahontas' supplication sets up the film's naturalist narrative; this is subsequently interrupted by the historical narrative, symbolised by the three tall ships that approach the Virginia shore. A series of long and medium shots conveys the smooth movement of the ships towards the land, accompanied by an identifying title that confirms this as "Virginia, 1607". Iain Macdonald states:

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[242] Burgoyne, *Film Nation*, p. 124.

> Malick seems to be drawing attention to this apparent paradox of human society: the stark contrast between the familial bonds that characterize the native social system, and the dirty and restrictive, artificial social edifice of the English – or, alternatively, between the very different ways these two cultures relate to nature.[243]

Viewing Pocahontas' prayer as an invocation of the Muse in the manner of Homer, Macdonald questions whether Malick is imposing a European perspective on Pocahontas (and the whole story), a factor that can be related to the "analinguistic" issue of voiceover. But he also believes that raising this concern "would be to miss the point by tacitly reinforcing the cultural dichotomies that Malick deconstructs in the film."[244] Just as there is a dissonance between the voice and image of Pocahontas, Smith's introduction is similarly disjunctive. Throughout the first twenty minutes he communicates only through grunts and laughs, and thus his "inner voice" cannot be directly compared or attributed to his talking aloud.

Neer sees this lengthy introductory sequence—around 10 minutes without dialogue—as establishing the grammar of the film and placing its figures within a historically specific environment: "by detailing the architecture of that world in its historical dimension, Malick shows the enabling condition […] not just of a community, but of its theorization."[245] Historical accuracy or desire for verisimilitude may not be Malick's central concern, but they are ultimately affirmed in the film's style and subjective approach, much as he embraces the social reality of cultural and amorous tensions in the film. Macdonald sees these tensions as "an occasion for exploring the enigma of nature and human nature, instinct and reason," in a way "relegated to the status of

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[243] Iain Macdonald, 'Nature and the Will to Power in Terrence Malick's *The New World*' in David Davies (ed.), *The Thin Red Line* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 91.
[244] Ibid.
[245] Neer, 'Terrence Malick's New World'.

epiphenomena or manifestations of natural processes."[246] Smith's love for Pocahontas

is left unconsummated and his abandonment of her partially derives from the cultural

divide that continues to separate them over the course of the film, though his

departure can also be related to Smith's desire for fame and fortune.

Pocahontas' response to Smith's supposed death is of grief and desolation, covering

herself in ashes and throwing herself on the ground; "You have gone away with my

life. You have killed the God in me," she exclaims. Having been captured and re-

christened as Rebecca, she explores for herself the Jamestown settlement, discovering

the profound differences in culture, customs and ideology compared to her own

people. Of her subsequent marriage to Rolfe, Burgoyne says:

> Where the romance of Smith and Pocahontas had been depicted as a
> breathtaking discovery of the unknown, set in the forest, the courtship of
> Rolfe and Rebecca reads as a kind of taming. Full of beauty and tenderness,
> their courtship is nonetheless conveyed in settings marked by domesticity
> – in the plowed fields, in the yard as she feeds the chickens, among the
> cattle.[247]

Departing from the guiding force of Smith's journals, this transition focuses on the

perspective of these historical figures rather than on the historical impact of various

agricultural practices (tobacco cultivation and the importing of livestock) and the

effects of disease carried by the colonists.

Macdonald believes *The New World* "asks the viewer to look upon what occurs in the

narrative, on the level of appearances, from a new perspective – not as an 'allegory' of

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[246] Macdonald, 'Nature and the Will to Power in Terrence Malick's *The New World*', p. 92.
[247] Burgoyne, *Film Nation*, p. 136.

nature, but rather […] as nature expressing itself as reason in history."[248] However, invoking Adorno, Macdonald also believes the film, in the articulation of its narrative, "rather undermines its own content and so incites us to see this articulation from a new vantage point: as 'nature-history', that is, as nature coalescing into history."[249] It could be argued (though Macdonald does not take this view) that the Pocahontas story is the story of nature, and Smith's the story of history. The presentation of two simultaneous perspectives underlines the film's narrative duality, which in turn incites a change of perspective in the viewer. Viewing Smith as a historical narrator is to recognise his own articulations—journals, diaries and memoirs, transposed to voiceover—as forms of historical material. Pocahontas is seen to channel nature into an ephemeral, undocumented (or undocumentable) stream of expression. Her voiceover acts as a manifestation of nature, becoming intertwined with—and complicating—the historical side of the story. History is interpolated into nature, developing into an expression of it and, from our modern perspective, visible within it. Thus *The New World* is Emersonian in both its human subjectivity and its response to nature.

Smith's status as historian has often been called into question. Macdonald notes how the Pocahontas story—a mainstay of American mythology—has been distorted by its romanticisation, "in part due to Smith's problem, as a writer, with separating fact from fiction."[250] His *Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles* depicts his largely fabricated experiences; nineteenth-century adaptations popularised the romantic relationship between Smith and Pocahontas. His accounts are largely

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[248] Ibid., p. 99.
[249] Ibid.
[250] Ibid., p. 100.

uncorroborated and lack consistency; many, such as contemporary writer David Lloyd and Henry Adams have dismissed the man as a self-aggrandising fabricator of history, and Lloyd Michaels succinctly dismisses Smith "because of his habit of self-mythology."[251]

Like the voiceover of Private Witt (Jim Caviezel) in *The Thin Red Line*, Pocahontas' monologue is neither explicative nor assertive; while her musings and questioning of the mother spirit centre the film (or at least her perspective) thematically on the subject of nature, they are so open as to leave discursive solutions untouched. It is only when Pocahontas is in England, and having had a cathartic dialogue with Smith, that she is able to answer her own question: "Mother, now I know where you live." Prior to this, her voiceover repetitiously invoked similar existential, spiritual questions, contrasting with Smith's somewhat more observational and historical entries and Rolfe's close, taciturn study of Pocahontas herself. As with Malick's other films, there is a complex relation between voiceover and image; Bersani and Dutoit view this complexity (specifically in *The Thin Red Line*, but also in Malick's work more generally) as "the *re*working of the individual within a new relational ethic."[252]

We have seen that the characters' voiceovers suggest an interpretive difference between them in how they vocalise and communicate their surroundings: oppositions of thought, nature, and culture are expressed, signalling differences in perspective. For instance, in the spell that Smith spends with the natives, he sees the beauty and purity of their way of life ("They have no concept of possession"), drawing

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[251] Michaels, *Terrence Malick*, p. 94.
[252] Bersani and Dutoit, *Forms of Being*, p. 135.

comparisons to the inherent evil or corruption of "civilised" society ("They have no word for greed, or jealousy"). But Pocahontas is attuned to this way of life, and though she makes little comment about her experiences in England, she is shown to experience new objects in a parallel manner to Smith's encounters with Powhatan (August Schellenberg), Pocahontas' father, and his tribe. The English landscape is sculpted and ornate, governed by rituals alien to Pocahontas, but it is here that she finds where her "mother" lives and engages with new forms of sensory and personal experience.

The role of nature in the film represents a shift away from the historical to the transformative and transcendental qualities of events and encounters, resulting in a particular *experiencing* of history. This could be seen as part of a more recent turn within the historical epic, perhaps resulting from the changing global political climate post-9/11, characterised by oblique reflections of contemporary geo-political and moral concerns.

A narrative of conversion: the film's coda

Richard Neer sees the narrative as being not only centred on discovery and exploration, but also on conversion: both Smith and Pocahontas, having encountered a new world, undergo ceremonies of rebirth. Smith is pardoned by Captain Newport (Christopher Plummer) at the start of the film to symbolise the clean start made by the colonists, and Powhatan later spares Smith's life after Pocahontas intervenes; Pocahontas herself is later baptised before her marriage to Rolfe. But these are superficial conversions: Smith does not profoundly change and eventually leaves the

settlement, while Pocahontas, despite becoming a Protestant and travelling to England, continues to pray to the Mother Spirit. This conversion is also a narrative and thematic one. Movement in the film is circular: from the arrival in Virginia, the return to England and Rolfe's final departure for America, though the trans-Atlantic journeys are not a major element of the plot. Of greater significance is the return in the denouement to aural and visual patterns of the film's opening, depicting "the conversion of the Old World into the New."[253] For instance, the wandering of Pocahontas around the cultivated English gardens and the game of hide-and-seek she plays with her son (Figure 1.7) is redolent of the coquettish games she played in the Virginia grassland earlier in the film when she first meets Smith, frolicking with a youth from her tribe and acting out the role of a deer (Figure 1.8). Wagner's music from *Das Rheingold* is heard again, symbolising a series of new beginnings for Pocahontas: she is at peace in England, and her death soon after appears to be serene and pain-free. The film cuts from Pocahontas lying on her deathbed with Rolfe at her side (Figure 1.9) to her son searching for her in the garden (Figure 1.10). In a familiar convention, we see her deathbed again, this time empty (Figure 1.11). Once more Pocahontas is shown dancing and somersaulting across the gardens (Figure 1.12), anointing herself in the waters of the lake and embracing the sky, perhaps a memory of before or an acknowledgment of her residual spiritual presence. Rolfe sets sail from England with their son, and their departure is intercut with a shot of her grave[254] (Figures. 1.13 and 1.14), appearing overgrown and worn with age as if viewed today, thus drawing a line from her actual death to her spiritual rebirth and, finally, to our present.

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[253] Neer, 'Terrence Malick's New World'.

[254] Although we see no close-up of the gravestone, this is the implicit assumption here. It is interesting to note that neither the name nor the date is shown in detail, thus refusing another indicator of temporal specificity.

For Burgoyne, the film presents "a kind of dialectical reading of the historical period, and of the landscape itself, approaching it from the perspective of the past as well as the perspective of the present day."[255] What Burgoyne emphasises here is that the construing of historical events is dependent on this dual system of perspective, contrary to other forms of historical cinema that either relate the perspective of the present on the past (through flashback and other linear devices) or more directly convey the historical perspective of the past. This strong relation of past and present is most clearly evoked in the film's final sequence, in which the acknowledgement of the historical nature of events is evidenced in Rolfe's voiceover in narrating a letter to his son, stating that "the events of which I write will soon be but a distant memory."

For Robert Sinnerbrink, the ending of the film achieves several goals, namely the "transformation of the (Western) desire for conquest and domination, transfigured through love, the overcoming of opposition, and the need to acknowledge a deeper (spiritual) unity with nature."[256] The aesthetic engagement with nature is what supports the film's depiction of human community: "Acknowledging this unity with nature is what makes possible […] the kind of plural co-existence, or marriage between Worlds, that *The New World* evokes though mythic history and cinematic poetry."[257] The impression of this form of mythic history is that of presenting the experience of an almost impossible point of view, going beyond the call (and ability) of the classical

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[255] Burgoyne, *Film Nation*, p. 142.
[256] Robert Sinnerbrink, 'From Mythic History to Cinematic Poetry: Terrence Malick's *The New World* Viewed', *Screening the Past* 26 [Online], December 2009. Available at: http://www.latrobe.edu.au/screeningthepast/26/early-europe/the-new-world.html, accessed 25/09/13.
[257] Ibid.

historian. In granting the appearance of the historical through precise and detailed verisimilitude, the film instead draws attention to the ahistorical space of myth in its rendering of events. The combination of historical detail and mythic poeticism is unstable, relying on its romanticisation to create meaning through experience; as Sinnerbrink says, "from our historical perspective," the film's romanticism is "untimely […] acting against the prejudices of the age in favour of a time to come."[258] While this approach is both risky and somewhat untenable, it can also be seen as "an aesthetic challenge to […] historical scepticism,"[259] therefore providing a new manner of experiencing this overtly mythologised period of history.

This closing sequence thus derives its affective power from the manner in which it recognises "the affinity it establishes between the game, the constitutive limitation of a world on film (which the film has so painstakingly set forth), and the equally constitutive limitation of death."[260] But it also plays with linearity and liminality in its representation of the spiritual, its confounding of narrative sequence, and in drawing a non-specific connection with the present. The return to a transfigured new world is disconcertingly absent of human presence, with the camera at once gliding through the trees, allowing the sunlight to dapple the screen, and then holding static shots of fast moving water running over rocks. Neer sees this ending as demonstrating how "the intelligibility of a New World simply ceases to be a question, because a myth of newness—perhaps the American myth—has been renounced."[261] Malick's interpretation of this historical world stages everyday yearnings—"political, erotic,

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[258] Ibid.
[259] Ibid.
[260] Neer, 'Terrence Malick's New World'.
[261] Ibid.

operatic, cinematic, philosophical"[262]—in order to draw attention to their meanings in both historical and contemporary contexts without asserting any particular philosophy himself. The film establishes a series of techniques—lighting, colour, camera movement, mise-en-scène, music, sound, dialogue, literary allusions, and editing—that allows for a specific expression of this historical world, a subjective way of viewing and interpreting it.

We have seen that Malick's mythic and poetic treatment of history is ultimately paradoxical: it strives for historical verisimilitude in its presentation of the experience of the encounters while grounding it in a highly detailed setting; but it also takes great liberties with historical facts and chooses to focus on the romantic relationship between Smith and Pocahontas that has long been considered a mythic element of this story. As Sinnerbrink states, the film "presents nature as through history did not exist and history as if it were a piece of nature,"[263] evidenced by the embedding of figures within landscapes. Despite the fact that Malick takes artistic liberties with the Pocahontas myth (explored in the following section), as all filmmakers have done, he does so for an authentic purpose in presenting a false historical truth. The presentation of both historically documented and entirely fictional elements within an authentically realised setting is a problematic approach to this story, creating a dramatic impetus for the narrative and also playing with historically debated events. There are many significant elisions in the narrative—not least in the Smith-Pocahontas love affair—which both enhance the film's fragmentary, transcendental style and

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[262] Ibid.
[263] Sinnerbrink, 'From Mythic History to Cinematic Poetry'.

emphasise the selectiveness and subjectivity of the historian's process of placing significance on particular events and their causation.

Working from Smith's journals and other documented material, Malick forms an interpretation that acknowledges the elisions in the historical evidence while interpolating his own set of literary and thematic influences. It could therefore be argued that this interpretation of events has as much value as those of printed historical research. Historians also call on artistic license in the assembly of events and the presentation of evidence and history, after all, has its own story to tell. Malick's broad adherence to Smith's journals and conscious alteration of historical fact, taking liberties with material that itself suffers from factual inconsistencies, allows him to play with temporality and causality as part of his historical narrative. Yet his role as a historian also seems to be focused on telling a balanced story, one that conveys the romance and conflict involved in this clash of cultures.

The historical epic and film style

I will go on to analyse the nonlinear editing strategies of *The New World*, but first it is imperative to examine aspects of the film's production in order to ascertain how they impact on film style. Cinematographer John Toll, who worked with Malick on *The Thin Red Line*, describes his approach to filming:

> He feels the direction, can see it out there, and knows that as he moves toward it things will become more clearly defined. He attempts to plot every stage of the trip before you begin, and then sort of fine-tunes his approach on the journey. It's a process of discovery, and he feels that it's a

bit pointless to define the parameters any further until you're closer to your objective.[264]

Malick and director of photography Emmanuel Lubezki chose to shoot in Virginia, using natural lighting, handheld cameras, and no heavy grip equipment. *The New World* was shot on film using Panavision cameras,[265] and Malick even chose to shoot certain "hyper-reality" scenes on 65 mm film, a format not in common usage since the 1970s. 65 mm film is more costly but provides a wider surface on which to achieve a crisper, richer image than standard 35 mm stock.[266] For Malick's focus on memory and oblique historical narratives, film seems to be the superior medium for the capture, remembrance, and re-experiencing of the past.[267] David Sterritt sees Malick's decision to integrate 65 mm footage with the film's predominant 35 mm stock (as well as his abjuration of digital) as a sign of his "effort to unify the natural and the cinematic – an effort with an almost mystical ring, intimating that an extra-large layer of film emulsion might absorb not just the light but the mysterious essence of people, places, and things."[268] Regarding these occluded connections between the physical and the metaphysical, Bazin stated that photography contains "tracings" that provided clues to

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[264] Stephen Pizzello, 'The War Within', *American Cinematographer* 80:2 (Feb 1999), p. 44.

[265] The filmmakers employed the Panaflex Millenium XL, Panaflex Platinum, and the Panavision 65 HR, as well as the Aaton 35-III (using Panavision lenses).

[266] The filmmakers wanted to shoot the entire film on 65 mm but there were postproduction barriers regarding sound and projection. Instead, they used the format only for "'hyper-enhanced moments' – when, for example, John Smith or Pocahontas has an important realization." B. Benjamin, 'Uncharted Emotions', *American Cinematographer* 87:1 (2006), p. 56.

[267] Until *The Tree of Life*, Malick's films were each set in the past. Although predominantly set in the 1950s, *The Tree of Life* is actually a reflection on Jack's (Sean Penn/Hunter McCracken) childhood (among grander notions) from the perspective of the present. *To the Wonder* marks Malick's first film set entirely in the present day. For more on Malick's depiction of and relation to modernity, see Adam Gallimore, 'Thoroughly Modern Malick', *Alternate Takes* [Online], 15 March 2013. Available at: http://www.alternatetakes.co.uk/?2013,3,469, accessed 24/09/13. Malick also produced a very traditional, conformist historical drama, Michael Apted's *Amazing Grace* (2006) about English abolitionist William Wilberforce (Ioan Gruffudd).

[268] David Sterritt, 'Film, Philosophy, and Terrence Malick's New World'.

hidden spiritual realities, and this seems to be carried over in the motivations and consequences of Malick's work.

Neer sees the development of certain aesthetic aspects within the film—widescreen, deep focus, backlighting, eye-level camera, offset compositions, contrast of earth and sky—as signifying a technique arc.[269] These recurring elements form themes that are developed gradually throughout the film—what David Bordwell describes as "hyperrefinements"—and in a way these operate together as their own form of narrative progression. The technical challenge of an approach that combines the three elements of widescreen, natural lighting and deep focus (and not shooting on digital) is that both the widescreen format and the wide aperture required for low-light shooting reduces depth of field. Shooting anamorphically and with a special Panavision lens, Malick was better equipped to stage in depth, and this staging was combined long shot lengths, steady camera movements (either handheld or with a Steadicam), and slow, deliberate movement of the actors to utilise the full width and depth of the frame. Together, Malick and Lubezki developed a charter of guiding principles for the film that they called a "Dogma" in reference to the 1995 Dogme manifesto.[270] Lubezki states:

> This was our set of rules, but like many dogmas, it has some contradictions. We wanted to avoid lighting, dollies, tripods, cranes, high-speed work, long

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[269] In *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), Bordwell comments on the tendency in American filmmaking to develop subtle, often unnoticeable patterns of technique that operate parallel to the film's story. Regarding technique arcs, see Bordwell, 'Lessons from BABEL', in which he discusses the links between this complex formal structuring of visual arc and the "network narratives" of Alejandro González Iñárritu. *Observations on film art* [Online], 27 November 2006. Available at: http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2006/11/27/lessons-from-babel/, accessed 25/09/13.

[270] Malick and Lubezki first met to discuss the filming of a biopic of Che Guevara which eventually transformed into Steven Soderbergh's version of *Che*.

lenses, filters and CGI. […] We could break any rule, and indeed, we broke them all, but we had these guiding ideas.[271]

These rules can be seen as both a set of self-imposed limitations, as well as a theoretical paradigm for thinking about how to approach a film of this type in visual terms. This style gives a sense of the constant flow of nature, the movement of the earth and the changing colours and shadows. There are few night scenes in the film, but they are lit with low, realistic lighting using sources such as fires and oil lamps, evoking the candlelit interiors of *Barry Lyndon* (1975). Moreover, as B. Benjamin suggests, this form of lighting supports the historical realism, "a reflection, perhaps, of an era when people lived by the rhythm of the sun."[272] The nonlinear structure has an impact on how the film was editing and colour timed, given the issues of lighting continuity that arose from shooting continuously and out of sequence.

Following the philosophy and ideas of photojournalists, Lubezki and his team thought of themselves as still photographers, moving fast and capturing ephemera: "Terry allows—actually encourages—the camera to find better ways to find reality and truth in a scene,"[273] Lubezki explains. "He always wanted to use what was happening at the moment," says Steadicam operator Jörg Widmer. "He pushed us to go for the unexpected. Go with the actors and capture things that we wouldn't 'normally' capture."[274] The free-flowing mise-en-scène is evident in fluid camerawork and

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[271] Benjamin 'Uncharted Emotions', p. 50. Lubezki says the film could not have been shot on digital at that time due to the exposure levels: "the Kodak negative helped immensely because it has incredible latitude. You can't shoot a movie like this on HD – not yet" (ibid., p. 51).
[272] Ibid.
[273] Quoted in Pauline Rogers, 'Once Upon a Time in America: Emmanuel Lubezki, ASC and Team Recreate the Early 17th Century for *The New World*', *International Cinematographers Guild Magazine* 76:11 (2005).   Available at: http://noctos.wordpress.com/2005/11/22/sunlight-strength/, accessed 25/09/13.
[274] Ibid.

sweeping camera movements rather than classic coverage such as medium shot to close-up or shot/reverse shot. Malick tends to avoid this style, but during the scene in which Smith and Pocahontas are re-united towards the end of the film, Benjamin notes that the alternating angles on the protagonists (Figures. 1.15 and 1.16) have "a disquieting effect that heightens the characters' awkwardness."[275] Having built its own rhythm in the film, this shift to traditional coverage disturbs its discursive approach; the use of shot/reverse shot suggests a different set of conventions for framing these characters in a new setting.

Amy Taubin reads the film as "a myth of origins" in which Smith and Pocahontas share a vision of the New World as the merging of two cultures by way of historical naturalism, of the Native Americans and the English, of America and Europe.[276] The imagery lends the story a sense of natural realism, re-creating a series of historical events in a truthful manner. While there is a degree of visual stylisation, this approach gives a sense of integrity that historicises the events by situating them in a nuanced, overarching period setting rather than a controlled or over-manipulated focus on the events in themselves. The camera movement provides a subjective point of view, as if watching the story from close up as participants, and this visual style is complemented by the lack of emotional communication though vocalisation. The use of a fluid, mobile camera lends the scenes an in-the-moment quality that supports the notion of this land being an unknown and potentially threatening place for Smith and the colonists. Furthermore, the use of natural light creates subtleties and gradations in low light levels, and contributes to the project of making the natural conditions part of

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[275] Benjamin, 'Uncharted Emotions', p. 56.
[276] Taubin, 'Birth of a Nation', p. 44.

the story. The use of wide-angled Panavision lenses, for instance, serves to curve the horizon (Figure 1.17), as if accentuating the roundness of the Earth and visually enforcing the colonist's presence in a new but shared world. Shooting into the sun also has the effect of making the actors penumbral and emphasising the contrasts between light and dark.

While the use of natural lighting initially posed a problem in the non-linear editing process in terms of shot matching, it actually proved useful in granting a uniformity to the film's visual presentation. Light sources are consistently behind the figures, with more light entering the camera directly and separating the characters from the background. However, this requires overexposing the film in order for the detail of the figures in the foreground to stand out, raising the contrast and resulting in the background sky becoming blanched and sparse, and thus easier to match. The figures are distinct from the broad, deep spaces they inhabit, yet the film's typically disjunctive shot composition—a dark, earthy lower half contrasting with the wan sky above—for Neer tends to "homogenize the actors while accentuating their relations to their surroundings,"[277] thus placing emphasis on the intrusive presence of the figures within this historicised natural space. Finally, the film's conservative palette eschews the bright and ornate period designs of other films such as *Marie Antoinette* (2006), *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* (2007), and *The Duchess* (2008). The characters spend much of the film in exteriors of browns, greens and blacks, the muted colour scheme extending to the costume design to form a non-hierarchical palette without chromatic cues.

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[277] Neer, 'Terrence Malick's New World'.

Camera movement and transcendental film style

In *The New World*, close-ups provide the suggestion of witnessing; witnessing history

through the characters provides a range of mythologised, romanticised accounts that

viewers historicise for themselves. The characters register emotions rather than

events, but this does not make the film any less historical; it questions these worlds

that existed in history, expressed through voiceover and visual discontinuities which

project a range of interpretations and identities within these personalised,

individuated historical experiences. But the spectator is also called upon to share

these subjectivities of looking on the world and being equally receptive to them. It

registers these relations and interpretations at the level of expression, but situates

them within a historical world, realised to the extent that is both inescapable and

barely acknowledged.

Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit examine the way in which Malick expresses the

subjectivity of the characters through his focus on faces:

> Malick's camera uses the close-up as a way of giving a face to the
> particularities of its own point of view. It shows the imprint of the act of
> looking on the subject of the looking. Very often the close-up is
> unaccompanied by speech; we see the filmed subject merely looking.
> Characters thus become multiple cameras within the film, cameras whose
> points of view, however, are not mediated by (the organisation of) the
> objects they are "filming", but are rather directly visible on the registering
> instrument itself, the face.[278]

The expressiveness of the actors' faces is highly individuated to these experiences

given their particular worldviews: each character registers the world in their own

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[278] Bersani and Dutoit, *Forms of Being*, p. 145.

way.[279] For instance, Smith, Pocahontas and Rolfe each express different experiences

of love. Rolfe, though his role is far smaller than the other protagonists, is both the

clearest observer (often without interaction) and the most expressive in terms of

articulating his feelings.[280] As with *The Thin Red Line*, it is the voiceovers "that carry

the weight of the film's emotional and intellectual expressivity," while allowing Malick

"to give us the face as pure visuality."[281] In this way the experiences of the characters

are manifestly inscribed on their faces and expressed through voiceover.

Neer notes the conspicuous use of "establishing tilts" in the film rather than traditional

establishing shots, a camera (and editing) practice which determines "continuity

between action and environment," thus "drawing attention to everything the camera

leaves out, the way a mobile frame necessarily occludes or crops."[282] Similarly, Adrian

Martin notes that the film's editing and sound mixing "form a truly complex weave of

elements through the entire film" and "constantly create detours, enigmas and

misdirections that derail the standard attributions or reinforcements of identity within

scenes."[283] This is expressed in the lack of reverse shots and point-of-view shots that

either wander off into obscurity or are revealed to be alternate vantage points, with

the perceived point-of-view subject wandering into shot and contradicting the initial

impression. For example, in one sequence the film cuts from a medium shot of John

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[279] While much of the camerawork involves shooting very close to the actors, focusing at a short distance reduces depth of field and undermines Malick's desire for deep focus photography. However, one consequence of this shooting style is that the backgrounds become softer, both lending it a painterly quality and emphasising the subjective nature of the narrative.

[280] Smith's most expressive instance of rage is deliberately underplayed as he throws over a table after he has been ordered to leave Jamestown and decided to lie to Pocahontas about his death. This sequence is absent of diegetic sound and cuts to black just as the table is upturned.

[281] Bersani and Dutoit, *Forms of Being*, p. 146.

[282] Neer, 'Terrence Malick's New World'.

[283] Adrian Martin, 'Approaching *The New World*' in Patterson (ed.), *The Cinema of Terrence Malick*, pp. 212-3.

Smith to a forward-moving Steadicam shot. The initial impression that this shot conveys his point of view (Figure 1.18) is contradicted as Smith emerges from screen left (Figure 1.19), interrupting our perceived perspective. In terms of camera movement, handheld and Steadicam camerawork has often been associated with giving the perspective of an additional character who is invisible yet presents their view of events.[284] However, this is obfuscated in *The New World* as shots may or may not correspond to a particular character's point of view, or could belong to this free-floating "additional character". This is a disengaging practice that questions the agency of the characters in its technique and creates a disconcerting, uneven feel given the overall flow of the film.

Morrison reflects on this issue in relation to nature and point of view:

> In its portrayal of nature as potentially "present at hand" (in a Heideggerean phrase), *The New World* extends this technique in a precise reversal. Now it is the characters who exceed the roving gaze of the forward-tracking camera, entering the dynamic frame from behind the source of its vantage point, moving beyond it into nature's enfolding surround – whether for sanctuary or for conquest.[285]

This is in contrast to the frequent "breaking" of the frame in *The Thin Red Line*, whereby characters run into view but the camera moves on to survey depopulated space. Pocahontas most clearly expresses this proximity to nature, to the extent that she both emerges from it and introduces Smith to it in sensory terms. While the landscape is depicted without aligning it with a particular human viewer, Pocahontas is frequently framed against it or seen to be interacting with it.

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[284] See Blain Brown, *Cinematography: Theory and Practice. Imagemaking for Cinematographers, Directors and Videographers* (Burlington, MA: Focal Press, 2002), p. 76.
[285] Morrison, 'Making Worlds, Making Pictures', p. 203.

In *The Material Ghost*, Gilberto Perez points up the fact that there is no requirement in modern cinema for a film to be consistent in terms of perspective, with POV shots neither necessary nor sufficient to establish a character's point of view: "The camera is an observer conventionally empowered to go everywhere and gain access anywhere, to see all that needs to be seen and at each moment to pick out the thing that matters."[286] Perez studies the point-of-view shot as a dramatic rather than narrative film technique, demonstrating how it can apply to a whole class or social outlook rather than the limitations of an individual's perspective.[287] He also compares a POV shot to a line of dialogue in granting subjectivity, but argues that "[a] line of dialogue is something the character chooses to say, but having the camera assume a character's perspective at a certain moment is not something the character chooses. The character has no say in a point-of-view shot."[288] But this brings us to another point in that while voiceover gives the character a voice in proceedings in a similar way that dialogue can do, present here is a lack of agency in how it is deployed, with which images it relates to and in what context. The use of voiceover and POV shots raise similar problems in giving us glimpses of a character's consciousness; in contrast, for Perez, "a narrative point of view gives us our compass in the world of the story."[289] Yet while the use of voiceover comes closer to establishing a centre of consciousness for its protagonists, the contradictions and ambiguities relating to the employment of POV shots seems to deliberately destabilise this approach to subjectivity.

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[286] Gilberto Perez, *The Material Ghost: Films and Their Medium* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1998), p. 75.
[287] Perez uses Jean Renior's *Boudu Saved from Drowning* (1932) to show how the narrative point of view is "not one character's perspective on the story but the whole way a social class sees the world" (ibid., p. 74).
[288] Ibid., p. 75.
[289] Ibid.

The overall effect is somewhat fragmentary and at odds with the notion that the camerawork and sound design is deliberately naturalistic and inconspicuous. By not conforming to traditional representational strategies of perspective, the film draws attention to the fact that it is neither presenting a highly subjective nor an objectively distanced view of history, instead articulating the conditions for the particular world which the characters inhabit, one so disjunctive and pervasively inconsistent as to be radically different from traditional depictions. Malick's dogmatic technique, in the composition, framing and focus of shots, together with non-linear editing, may give a greater indication of the fragmented mental states of its protagonists. It may explain the conspicuous stylistic disjunctures, as well as the film's gentle, oneiric flow. Concomitantly, however, there seems to exist little division between the agency and autonomy of these mental states, and their interpretation can only occur in the broader cinematic world determined by the film. The film's creation of its historical world, achieved through these techniques, informs and determines the extent and conditions of the filmed narrative, one that is essentially linear but appears disjointed in the relation of sentiment and the performance of action.

Transcendentalism can be thought of as a way of linking film style with the earlier arguments about subjectivity and historical experience. In *Transcendental Style in Film*, Paul Schrader understands transcendence as based on a fundamental rupture between humans and the worlds they inhabit. Transcendental film style expresses a "spiritual universality," expressed in the works of Robert Bresson, Yasujiro Ozu and Carl Theodore Dreyer, and "uses precise temporal means—camera angles, dialogue,

editing—for predetermined transcendental ends."[290] This style hinges on a three-part narrative movement: the first of these is the *everyday*, "a meticulous representation of the dull, banal commonplaces of everyday living."[291] The second move is one of *disparity*, the introduction of "an actual or potential disunity between man and his environment which culminates in a decisive action."[292] The final stage is one of *stasis*, described as "a frozen view of life which does not resolve the disparity but transcends it."[293] This is the end product of transcendental style, wherein a decisive action does not settle the disparity but places it in stasis, a point at which it can be overcome.

The concept of transcendental style can be related to the form of *The New World* given that one of Malick's continual themes expressed is that of man's fall from paradise. Like the rural paradise of Texas in *Days of Heaven* or the Melanesian island idylls of *The Thin Red Line*, the pure, untarnished land of what was thereafter known as Virginia is also a historically-specific location. This land is blemished by the arrival of the "civilised" people, one of its spiritual leaders is removed, stolen away to England to meet royalty and experience her own "new world". Arguably, the transcendental imagining of the period is somewhat at odds with its fact-based narrative of exploration and conquest.[294]

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[290] Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1988), pp. 3-4.

[291] Ibid., p. 39.

[292] Ibid., p. 42.

[293] Ibid., p. 49.

[294] The subordination of dramatic development and character construction to sublime images of nature and invocations of spirituality, together with a concern with personal transcendence, suggests further comparisons with *Black Robe*.

The New World represents everyday living in Virginia, setting up a series of disparities that exist between the natives and the colonists, as well as between man and nature more generally, especially in the depiction of famine and disease within Jamestown. Presenting a collision of Smith's ordinary world with the enchanted world of Pocahontas, the film finds meaning in the period detailing of their respective worlds. Smith offers little perspective of transcendence, owing to his disenchantment, it seems, and disappears from the narrative only to reappear briefly at the end. Instead, the death of Pocahontas seems to offer the transcendental impulse of the film's conclusion. Her dying moments are taken from historical accounts, and are followed by a montage of images of the unspoilt land from which she originated. Transcendence in *The New World* is expressed in the sense of loss, and this is expressed in the coda of (mostly) static shots that convey a transfigured new world, using images of trees and flowing water to depict a natural world on the brink of major change. This could be compared with Schrader's identification of stasis in Ozu's work, evident in the final montage of scenes, presenting "a still-life view that connotes Oneness. It is the same restrictive view which began the film: the mountain has become a mountain again, but in an entirely different way."[295]

Mark Cousins notes how the film is mostly about "seeing and feeling, their immediacy, their necessity and their limits," reminiscent of the work of historian-philosopher David Hume.[296] He further believes that the mystery in Malick's work "lies in his ability to use the medium of film to show that it is the process of receiving impressions of the

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[295] Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film*, p. 49.
[296] Mark Cousins, 'Praising *The New World*' in Patterson (ed.), *The Cinema of Terrence Malick*, p. 195. Hume's work includes *A Treatise on Human Nature* (1740), *Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), and *Enquiries Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751).

world that is transcendent,"[297] finding wonder in the pre-cognitive experience of engaging sensually with available stimuli. This reflects both the impressionism of Hume's work and the existential soul-searching of Heidegger. Robert Sinnerbrink consummately sums up Malick's approach:

> There is in Malick's work a whole cinema of touch and gesture, mime and dance, silence and song; a poetry of images depicting the manifold ways human beings inhabit both human and natural worlds, whether in harmony or in conflict, and dwell as dependent upon nature, whether they are alienated from, or autochthonous with, the earth.[298]

This demonstrates the formalistic function of stasis in contrast to the experiential form of the everyday and disparity. As Schrader says, "they taunt and tease the spectator's emotions," presenting obstacles for expression as opposed to the manner by which stasis "incorporates those emotions into a larger form," reinforcing the newfound realisation of life and thus "transforms empathy into aesthetic appreciation, experience into expression, emotions into form."[299]

Digital editing

The editing style of Malick's films has been described as "diffuse, elliptical, and structurally radical,"[300] creating a discontinuous structure through jump cuts and flashbacks. A key distinction here is in the shift from analogue to digital editing and the way in which Malick has availed himself of new techniques. This is a transition that seems to have received little critical investigation despite the fact that the postproduction process has largely been digitised since the 1990s. On a flatbed

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[297] Cousins, 'Praising *The New World*', p. 196.

[298] Sinnerbrink, 'From Mythic History to Cinematic Poetry'.

[299] Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film*, p. 51.

[300] Chris Wisniewski, 'A Stitch in Time', *Reverse Shot* 22 [Online], 2008. Available at: http://www.reverseshot.com/article/terrence_malick, accessed 25/09/13.

analogue editing system, the process is linear and physical, i.e. the celluloid itself is cut and spliced together. On non-linear digital systems, such as Avid and Final Cut Pro, options can be tested simultaneously and results can be viewed immediately.[301] Non-linear video editing permits greater flexibility and cost-effectiveness compared to flatbed editing systems, such as Steenbeck and K.-E.-M. The aesthetic implications of this system change are harder to define, which, as Wisniewski states, is due to the fact that digital editing systems, "by and large, don't make the things we see in movies possible; they make them easier to achieve."[302] Digital editing makes it easier to cut more frequently and reorder or reshape footage without strict adherence to continuity editing.

While the film conveys a chronological narrative, the non-linear manner of its editing induces a startling abruptness of seasonal change, especially apparent in the theatrical cut in which history is not being told fluidly or evenly; the transitions are sudden and non-specific in the film's paratactic structure. The "Extended Cut" imposes a greater sense of structure on its historical framework.[303] While this version provides a sense of clarity in locating events, the earlier cut does not easily break down the passing of time into seasons or periods, giving no indication of time after the initial "1607" title at the beginning of the film. Nature is the only constant, time and man are not: for Morrison, Malick imputes nature "an aspect of inertness that renders newly pressing the

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[301] This process requires that the raw celluloid footage is transferred to a digital intermediate so that it can subsequently be edited on a computer using video editing software.

[302] Wisniewski, 'A Stitch in Time'.

[303] The film had a limited 150-minute release in December 2005 before being re-edited to a 135-minute wide release in January 2006. In October 2008, a 172-minute "Extended Cut" received a commercial home release.

question of how we are to look at it, or to be in relation to it."[304] This relates to the

overarching question of how we relate to the past, especially when the film

deliberately chooses not to instruct the viewer through a series of historical events

that are clearly positioned on an established timeline. For instance, the central battle

scene in *The New World* between the natives and the colonists, like those of *The Thin

Red Line*, is neither a glorification nor a vilification of war; as Amy Taubin notes, "it

never climaxes but cycles and recycles until it's suddenly over."[305] As Martin notes,

Malick's films "carve out a sense of time beyond everyday reality as well as everyday

cinema,"[306] and this has profound effects when dealing with historical figures and

events, as well as historical cinema.

Malick's films are famed for being re-constituted in the editing room, and the

collaborative nature of the film's editing—by four different editors in various

locations—signals that the film is very much a digital product, with Malick presiding

over all.[307] His process of trimming, extending, and reshaping the film over three

released versions emphasises his debt to non-linear digital editing. Editor Richard

Chew says:

> We also had to understand that Terry likes the eccentric frame. Nothing
> can be right on. In editing, he was always telling us not to use too perfectly
> framed shots. He wanted to be on a shoulder or see part of the face or cut
> the face in half. Or he'd like being behind the person. One of his favorite
> angles is over the shoulder to relate distance and relationship between two
> characters.[308]

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[304] Morrison, 'Making Worlds, Making Pictures', p. 201.
[305] Taubin, 'Birth of a Nation', p. 45.
[306] Martin, 'Approaching *The New World*', p. 220.
[307] For more on the production of *The New World*, see Rogers, 'Once Upon a Time in America'.
[308] Quoted in Rogers 'Once Upon a Time in America'.

Editing is used to convey the dramatic and spatial relationships between characters rather than to provide a central focus. Malick disregards continuity editing and conventional narrative storytelling, violating the 180-degree rule and using jump cuts and insert shots to heighten discontinuity. While this editing style is present in his earlier work, digital editing has allowed his style to become even more elliptical and fragmented, creating further temporal and spatial incongruities, but ones that are also more textured and complex. The historical narrative becomes fleeting, ambiguous and ephemeral: as Wisniewski says, "images, moments, and sequences don't so much build as accumulate."[309] Sound plays an important role in bridging scenes that cut back and forth between the two, creating a flow between two separate events without establishing either their chronology or how they relate to one another.

The New World was taken by some (such as Dave Kehr and Thierry Jousse[310]) as the worst embodiment of the modern phenomenon of the "Avid film", one edited on digital systems which encourage "maximum freeform sloppiness in the filming and results in the lack of a strong, overall rhythm or structure in the global montage."[311] Martin sees the emphasis on on-location improvisation in terms of gesture and expressive action rather than dialogue as creating "rich possibilities for a radical, decentred montage structure, but [it] also places unfamiliar and heavy demands on [the] actors, and on [Malick's] own 'impulsive inspiration' at the moment of filming the gesture of an actor's body in natural space."[312]

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[309] Wisniewski, 'A Stitch in Time'.
[310] Thierry Jousse, 'Munich, Malick et la politique des auteurs', *Panic* 3 (2006), pp. 25-27. Dave Kehr, 'Malick as Messiah' [Online], 2006. Available at: http://www.davekehr.com/, accessed 25/09/13.
[311] Martin, 'Approaching *The New World*', p. 219.
[312] Ibid.

In fact, Malick's shooting style is more typical of digital filmmaking, with little consideration of the cost or wastage of celluloid.[313] It could be argued that this is a technologically deterministic framework in which non-linear digital editing systems have a direct influence on the shooting process by allowing filmmakers to shoot as much coverage as desired, as it would be almost impossible to work through such a massive amount of footage with reel-to-reel flatbed editing.[314] While advanced editing tools and methods can account for different approaches to filming, in the case of *The New World* this can also be aligned with Malick's changing aesthetic sensibilities and the specific historical world envisioned by the film.

Historical re-enactment

Robert Burgoyne has stated that "[d]ramatic historical films convey the events of the past in a variety of ways, […] with cinematic style, narrative design, and mode of address defined by specific codes of expression depending on the focus and approach of the film."[315] For Burgoyne, what brings these different orders of representation together is "the concept of reenactment, the act of imaginative re-creation that allows the spectator to imagine they are 'witnessing again' the events of the past."[316] In his discussion of historical re-enactment, Paul Ricœur follows the conception put forth by R.G. Collingwood in *The Idea of History* which calls for "the past as history's *absent*

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[313] This would account for the fact that over one million feet of film was shot for *The New World*, compared to the 100,000 feet used on *Days of Heaven*. In *Side by Side* (2012), a documentary about the science, art and impact of digital cinema, cinematographer Reed Morano describes how people on set take things more seriously when using film, being respectful of "the money running through the camera."

[314] Digital editing enables a particularly wasteful shooting style, exacerbated by the lower cost of digital filming and storage practices. For more on the effect of digital processes on Malick's style and themes of waste, see Gallimore, 'Thoroughly Modern Malick'.

[315] Burgoyne, *The Hollywood Historical Film*, p. 5.

[316] Ibid., p. 7.

partner."[317] Collingwood affirms that "all history is the re-enactment of past thought in the historian's own mind,"[318] but Ricœur counters with the caveat that "re-enacting does not consist in reliving but in rethinking, and rethinking already contains the critical moment that forces us to take the detour by way of the historical imagination."[319]

The notion of historical re-enactment is a paradoxical one that requires the historian to compose a coherent and functional account, and also to "construct a picture of things as they really were and of events as they really happened."[320] Re-enactment abolishes the temporal distance between the past and the present by the act of rethinking what was once thought, thus challenging the definition of history as "an imaginary picture of the past."[321] Implicit in the conception of re-enactment are the notions of process, acquisition, incorporation, development, and criticism, notions that are complicated when we consider what Ricœur describes as "the *survival of the past in the present*,"[322] an act that views historians as inheriting remaining traces of the past.

Robert Rosenstone argues that filmmakers are able to create the past in a way that "is at once serious, complex, challenging, and 'true' in its ability to render meanings rather than the literal reality of past events."[323] For filmmakers, re-enactment is a method that involves paying careful consideration to context and material conditions in order

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[317] Ricœur, *The Reality of the Historical Past*, p. 5.
[318] R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 215.
[319] Ricœur, *The Reality of the Historical Past*, p. 8.
[320] Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, p. 246.
[321] Ibid., p. 248.
[322] Ricœur, *The Reality of the Historical Past*, p. 12
[323] Robert A. Rosenstone, '*Walker*: The Dramatic Film as (Postmodern) History' in Rosenstone (ed.), *Revisioning History*, p. 202.

to create a text or performance worthy of the term, going beyond Collingwood's call for intellectual reassessment. But, for Burgoyne, re-enactment also involves a form of double consciousness in the rethinking of the past: "Reenacting the past necessarily calls forth the historical imagination on the part of the filmmaker and the spectator."[324] Both parties need to project themselves into the past in order to create and experience this historical reality.

This is emphasised by the presentation of the historical locale, of shooting on site in the real places where events took place. This addresses the connection between past and present by demonstrating that the location continues to exist and is therefore a site of importance. The location-specific element is central to the mise-en-scène in redressing it for the period, with the emphasis on locations as physical historical sites acting as a fundamental way of proving that these events *actually* took place. As Jerome de Groot says, "History somehow has to 'live' while acknowledging its very 'pastness'."[325] The need for visual and locational authenticity raises a set of issues relating to realism, a trope in cinema that always relates to the production of authenticity. Re-enactment signifies an attempt to create a realist discourse, one that can be furthered by documentary-esque or subjective shooting and editing styles.

The choice to shoot on location at the Chickahominy River in Virginia, a tributary of the James River not far from the original Jamestown settlement, allowed forests and rivers to be rendered "in a visual style that is original and poetic."[326] In designing the

[324] Burgoyne, *The Hollywood Historical Film*, p. 8.

[325] Jerome de Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 113.

[326] Benjamin, 'Uncharted Emotions', p. 49.

production, the filmmakers reproduced the architecture, customs, clothing and artifacts of the time in highly detailed fashion. Structures in the Jamestown settlement and the Algonquin village (Figure 1.20) were built according to historical and archaeological evidence, using traditional materials and tools. Within the film, the depiction of architectural frameworks shows the processes of construction and the existing structures of this historical world, the buildings of civilisation. A 3-acre field was planted with strains of Indian corn and tobacco, and Blair Rudes, professor of linguistics at the University of North Carolina, even reconstructed the extinct Virginian Algonquin language used in the film.[327] This created an apparently authentic setting in which the actors were situated, complemented by Malick's encouraging both and improvisational acting and a continuous shooting style.[328] *The New World* was shot using hand-held cinematography and Steadicams rather than dollies, cranes or tripods in order to lend the film's imagery a spontaneous, non-synthetic visual quality that embraces unsteady movement through real-world spaces. It also made much use of natural lighting, with very few artificial lights, and no digital enhancements.[329]

Jerome de Groot examines the collectivised experience of historical re-enactment that relates to live-action role playing of largely combat-based events, viewing it as an unconventional form of historiography. He states that "[r]e-enactment reminds the participant and the (potential) viewer of the essential otherness of history,"[330]

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[327] Rudes claims that this insistence on authenticity came from Malick's desire to hear Pocahontas speaking these true words in her own dialect. Quoted in Alan Boyle, 'How a linguist revived "New World" language', *MSNBC* [Online], 21 January 2006. Available at: http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/10950199#.UGoTuU3LSBo, accessed 25/09/13.

[328] "We tried to capture the accidents, the things you cannot plan, the moments that feel the most real," says Lubezki. Quoted in Benjamin, 'Uncharted Emotions', p. 52.

[329] *The New World* does feature one visual effect shot, with CGI used to recreate a pair of now-extinct Carolina parakeets.

[330] de Groot, *Consuming History*, p. 105.

presenting the past as continually different from the present. *The New World*, together with the forms historical re-enactment I examine later in my analysis of *Public Enemies*, suggests that cinematic historical re-enactment shares the way in which "the past is reanimated through physical and psychological experience"[331] in order to capture the liveness of events. Paradoxically, this underscores the fact that re-enactment often intends to convey the individuality of a particular event. Furthermore, this form of re-enactment is practised for the consumption of both re-enactor and observer—as Della Pollock argues, the historicist performer is both subject and object[332]—and while particular period details and authentic settings in both *The New World* and *Public Enemies* can, for some actors, contribute to the performance and character psychology, the experience of re-enactment is ultimately for the pleasure of the spectator.

William Dray sees Collingwood as warning against "thinking that historical reasoning from evidence can recapture the immediacy of past experiences, the private mental process which an agent actually went through."[333] His defence of re-enactment as an essential dimension of historical practice puts forth the notion that historians should make an imaginative leap into the past in order to challenge contemporary knowledge and values on an intellectual level. Technology has clearly been an unforeseen part of modern re-enactments of historical events, but it is questionable whether the creation of hyperreal visual representations of the past through CGI and other digital

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[331] Ibid.
[332] Della Pollock (ed.), *Exceptional Spaces: Essays in Performance and History* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), p. 7.
[333] William H. Dray, *History as Re-Enactment: R.G. Collingwood's Idea of History* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 125.

technologies has enhanced this imaginative process.   Historical re-enactment is, essentially and inherently, an act of falsification.[334]

Myth and history in *The New World*

Although *The New World* acknowledges Pocahontas as a figure of popular myth, there is also an awareness that any representation of her will be based around what a filmmaker chooses to interpolate or project onto her. Martin argues that Malick takes Pocahontas "as legend" by imaginatively expanding the fictional elements of her narrative, most notably in the romantic relationship between Pocahontas and Smith. This seems permissible, for Martin, due to Malick's dedication and knowledge of his material:

> Any diligent researcher into Malick's creative process quickly realises that any text or document, fictional or non-fictional, that can be consulted [...] has not only been previously well-read and digested by Malick, but also (and this is the creative part) somehow absorbed, incorporated, woven into the surface texture or deep structure of his film on that subject.[335]

Regarding the use of historical documents, Pierre-Yves Pétillon illustrates how Malick simultaneously dramatises different interpretations of the rare and elliptical traces of Pocahontas' life.

Despite the fact that Malick takes artistic liberties with the Pocahontas myth (as all filmmakers have done), he does so for an authentic purpose in presenting a false historical truth. The key element of the Smith-Pocahontas romance is secrecy, in that

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[334] The concept of re-enactment can be related to Jean Baudrillard's vision of the contemporary appetite for realistic simulation as leading to the enthusiastic consumption of the simulacrum, a spectacle that never took place.

[335] Martin, 'Approaching *The New World*', pp. 214-215. Martin finds Malick comparable only to Stanley Kubrick, Carl Theodor Dreyer and Victor Erice in this regard.

they are romantically involved but keep this between themselves. This is seen as a necessity given the concerns relating to their age difference, the interracial nature of the relationship, and the fact that she is the daughter of a "King". The Powhatan tribe sees nothing of their intimate interactions, and there is the sense that they both wish to remain undiscovered: during one of their first encounters in which the couple explore their respective languages, Smith's guilty expression as Pocahontas brushes his lips (Figures. 1.21 and 1.22) indicates his preoccupation with being watched. The presentation of this romance seems more considered and plausible than traditional accounts that see them swiftly married or immediately and publically declare their feelings for each other.

Significantly, the most familiarly mythologised part of this story—Pocahontas' saving of Smith from imminent death—is elided in film, viewed through neither the conventional Eurocentric perspective nor a revisionist native one. The saving of Smith by Pocahontas is, in the words of David Price, "in all probability, the most often told tale in American history, inspiring drama, novels, painting, statuary, and films."[336] Pétillon raises the cross-cultural issue of rebirth as the performance of a "pretend" execution, whereby her actions are part of the premeditated act of spectacle. Given the importance of Pocahontas' dramatic gesture that saved Smith's life, it is remarkable that Malick chooses not to visualise it. The screen cuts to black after Smith's death is ordered by Powhatan, and Smith is then seen lying on the floor of the Indian dwelling, surrounded by chanting women, conducting a ritual of rebirth. This demonstrates a clear instance where Malick shies away from adhering to the

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[336] David Price, *Love and Hate in Jamestown: John Smith, Pocahontas, and the Heart of a New Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), pp. 67-68

mythological elements of the Pocahontas tale, shifting concerns to the cleansing of Smith that enables him to be accepted by the group and develop his relationship with Pocahontas by teaching her about his people. *The New World* does not so much attack the foundational American narrative as renarrativise America's origin story as history rather than myth.

It is also important to consider the shifting identities of Pocahontas within the historical narrative, a nomadic figure exiled from both her tribe's village and from Jamestown. Of her itinerant identity, Burgoyne states: "Pocahontas is somehow a liminal character, both Indian and not Indian, both a settler and a native, both married and not married, both Pocahontas and Rebecca."[337] The film seems to express many of the ideological functions she has traditionally been used to convey, depicting her multitudinous roles and meanings but rooting her in a natural and spiritual world of expression. Martin notes that Pocahontas is only named as such in the closing credits, her name otherwise erased from the story entirely. While Martin believes the omission of Pocahontas' name is an act of displacing (and subsequently investigating) personal/feminist identity,[338] it could also be seen as a refusal to mythologise the character or obfuscate the cultural principles and ideologies behind the figure of Pocahontas. The decision not to use the name "Pocahontas" within the film is a revisionist strategy to establish her out as a generic nymph-like native princess, subsequently christened "Rebecca" when she visits the fledgling fort of Jamestown, as if the name itself is too mythological, too culturally loaded for Malick to warrant its acknowledgement in the film. In relating myth to history, Morrison affirms that in *The*

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[337] Burgoyne, *Film Nation*, p. 139.
[338] Martin, 'Approaching *The New World*', p. 212.

New World "the myth of Pocahontas is situated squarely among the elements of the already known. In the demythologised context of modern history, this tale is best understood as an instance of false consciousness in which the conscription of a native girl as a hero of the colonial cause conceals her actual victimisation."[339] Malick's treatment of the mythological side of the story is to confront the assimilation of Pocahontas by conveying both the colonists and the natives as people of their own cultures and histories, therefore depicting their relationship as one based around cultural exchange rather than dominance or appropriation.

While the film evokes the ideologically suspect myths of many Pocahontas adaptations which have been shown to be historically inaccurate, Sinnerbrink sees the film as relating history in the form of "*mythic poetry*," focusing on the film's "audacious romanticism" that leads to "naïve romanticist approach," as well as the way in which it "immerses [the spectator] in the 'timeless' space of historical myth" through its mythopoetical approach.[340] Malick is able to both retrieve and rejuvenate the Pocahontas myth by positioning it within a fully realised historical world and providing subjective, yet balanced viewpoints on the events that occur. This does not mean that the film attempts to debunk myth as myth; instead, Malick uses the mythology for his own purposes, allowing him to interpolate his own ideas within an elliptical and transcendentalist narrative. However, as Taubin states, "For Malick, beauty, in art as well as in nature, transcends history."[341] The film depicts both historical events and the experience of myth, presenting the subjective and metaphysical encounters within

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[339] Morrison, 'Making Worlds, Making Pictures', p. 204.
[340] Sinnerbrink 'From Mythic History to Cinematic Poetry'.
[341] Taubin, 'Birth of a Nation', p. 45.

this period of history and thereby operating as a meditation on the relationship between the two.

Distancing the subject: Steven Soderbergh's *Che*

In *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson suggest that the adoption of new technologies has three principal functions: it provides greater efficiency, offers product differentiation, and raises quality standards.[342] The shift from analogue to digital production has allowed for smaller crews and lowered print costs, and the adaptability and flexibility of the digital format facilitates the production and integration of 3D and other visual effects. It has also resulted in smaller, lighter, more mobile cameras, thus making the filmmaking process more efficient. Shooting digitally has become more widely accepted by studios in producing mainstream commercial films,[343] being simpler to use for filming and editing and allowing for more cost-effective filmmaking on a general scale.[344] In terms of differentiation, there now exists a plethora of digital cameras that are widely available and offer a broad spectrum of qualities, resolutions, shutter speeds, chip sizes, tones, and colour ranges. Different equipment can be employed to create various aesthetics and novel or immersive experiences, while simultaneously advancing cinematic traits of historical

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[342] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, pp.243-247.

[343] To give an impression of the impact of digital as a medium, only 7 of the 20 highest grossing (non-animated) films of 2012 (35%) were filmed exclusively on film, with 9 (45%) shot entirely on digital, and 4 films (20%) using digital for some scenes. A report by IHS Screen Digest projects that celluloid production will cease by the end of 2015, ending film distribution on celluloid despite only 51.5% of worldwide screens being the capability for digital projection. See Tambray A. Obenson, 'Report: Celluloid Projection Will Cease In The USA & Other Major Markets By End Of 2013', *Indiewire* [Online], 08 June 2012. Available at: http://blogs.indiewire.com/shadowandact/50175660-b1b1-11e1-bcc4-123138165f92, accessed 25/09/13.

[344] For more on this issue, see John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), and Nicholas Rombes, *Cinema in the Digital Age*, as well as a recent debate by Manohla Dargis and A.O. Scott, 'Film Is Dead? Long Live Movies: How Digital Is Changing the Nature of Movies', *The New York Times* [Online], 06 September 2012. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/09/movies/how-digital-is-changing-the-nature-of-movies.html, accessed 25/09/13.

verisimilitude and photorealism.[345]   The effect of these technologically-enabled approaches can serve to heighten the historical spectacle and enhance engagement with the period diegesis.

Digital was initially popular for economic reasons, in terms of post-production costs (lab costs, couriers, rushes) as well as those of production (camera, lenses, rigs, etc.). The technological advances had economic consequences, and the balance between quality and cost was acceptable enough for the format to be adopted by the mainstream. With a larger number of digital cameras available, competition has driven the technology, and filmmakers have adapted to the format by identifying its weaknesses and playing to its strengths. Yet as the quality has improved, approaching and—for some—enhancing the dynamic range of film, there are now fewer reasons *not* to shoot digitally. While the replacement of film cameras and print exhibition by digital cameras and projectors was predicted by Walter Murch and Godfrey Cheshire (among others),[346] Matt Zoller Seitz (writing in 2011) believes that "digital cinema will become so adept at mimicking the *look* of film that within a couple of decades, even cinematographers may not be able to tell the difference."[347]   Digital cameras are increasingly able to replicate the painterly colours, hard sharpness and, crucially, the

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[345] There is, of course, an issue of spectatorial perception in differentiating between digital and film, and there has been a major technological push to produce digital images indistinguishable from celluloid. A useful overview of the development of digital cameras is provided in *Side by Side*, a documentary mentioned earlier.

[346] See Review of Literature, pp. 44-45. Cheshire stated in 1999: "For the time being, most movies will still be shot on film, primarily because audiences are used to the look, but everything else about the process will be, in effect, television – from the transmission by satellite to the projection, which for all intents and purposes is simply a glorified version of a home video projection system." See Cheshire, 'The Death of Film/The Decay of Cinema'.

[347] Quoted in Matt Zoller Seitz, 'R.I.P., the movie camera: 1888-2011', *Salon* [Online], 13 October 2011. Available at: http://www.salon.com/2011/10/13/r_i_p_the_movie_camera_1888_2011/, accessed 25/09/13.

flicker of motion picture film, and this has led to a more widespread acceptance of the digital transition by both filmmakers and spectators.

Steven Soderbergh is a major (sometime) Hollywood director who has most vocally and openly embraced digital filmmaking. He is also one of the few mainstream multi-hyphenate filmmakers, acting as cinematographer (as Peter Andrews) and editor (as Mary Ann Bernard) as well as directing, producing and, occasionally, writing. Geoff King identifies Soderbergh as the individual who best illustrates the ability to move between Hollywood and the independent sector, noting his more recent turn towards low-budget alternative productions as well as experimenting with innovative distribution strategies for his non-studio films. King's analysis observes a series of elements that mark the films as distinct from the commercial mainstream in terms of both the subject matter and a number of formal strategies.[348] Similarly, Mark Gallagher notes Soderbergh's interest in historical contexts and his affinity for corresponding filmmaking movements, from German Expressionism (*Kafka*, 1991) to classical Hollywood cinema (*The Good German*, 2006).[349]

Beginning with low-budget, experimental work, Soderbergh explored the capabilities and boundaries of digital systems to create small-scale, ambiguous narratives such as *Full Frontal* (2002), a look at the lives of Hollywood actors, and the small-town murder mystery *Bubble* (2005) which used non-professional actors.[350] With *Che*, Soderbergh

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[348] Geoff King, *Indiewood, USA: Where Hollywood Meets Independent Cinema* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), pp. 141-158.

[349] Mark Gallagher, *Another Steven Soderbergh Experience: Authorship and Contemporary Hollywood* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013), p. 67.

[350] *Full Frontal* was shot using the Canon XL-1s, and *Bubble* using the Sony CineAlta HDC-F950 and the Sony HDW-F900.

began working with a prototype of the Red One, a high performance digital camera with the resolution and visual capabilities comparative to 35 mm film, convenient in both its versatility and its functionality being very lightweight and adaptable.[351] Using the Red One is more analogous to the challenges of shooting on film in that it requires the diligence and control of celluloid-based cameras rather than the automatic features of digital camcorders that utilise MiniDV.[352] Soderbergh's artistic influence and industrial fluidity is evident in the range and depth of his work, and Jennifer Holt sees his broad array of filmmaking approaches as definitive of his whole career:

> As a director he has navigated through various genres, themes, financing sectors, visual styles and narrative formulas. […] He seems to float effortlessly between studio projects and independently financed productions, big-budget star vehicles and artful experiments with unknown actors, and a seemingly inexhaustible list of genres.[353]

Che is an epic, two-part historical biopic of Marxist guerrilla leader Ernesto Guevara (Benicio Del Toro), a French-Spanish co-production[354] filmed digitally and featuring

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[351] Soderbergh has since used the Red One for his subsequent films *The Girlfriend Experience* (2009) and *The Informant!* (2009), and used a variation, the Red One MX, to film *Contagion* (2011) and *Haywire* (2012). He progressed to using the Red Epic for shooting *Magic Mike* (2012) and *Behind the Candelabra* (2013).

[352] On his experience of making *Che* using digital cameras that would often crash or overheat—they are essentially computers after all, and prototypes at that—Soderbergh claims that what they did allow for in terms of accelerated workflow and enhanced flexibility "resulted in a better movie." Important in this is the dialogue between filmmaker and technician, and Soderbergh talks of an "immediate call and response between the people who are shooting and the people who are making the cameras." Quoted in *Side by Side*.

[353] Jennifer Holt, 'Steven Soderbergh' in Yvonne Tasker (ed.), *Fifty Contemporary Film Directors* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 356-357. It is also worth noting that Soderbergh has also produced several works for television (*K Street* [2003], *Unscripted* [executive producer, 2005]), as well as documentaries (*And Everything Is Going Fine* [2010]) and short films (*Equilibrium*, a segment of *Eros* [2004]).

[354] *Che* was developed by Del Toro with producer Laura Bickford and, interestingly, for a time Terrence Malick was attached as both writer and director before Soderbergh eventually took over the project. The film's joint French and Spanish financing (by Wild Bunch and Telecinco Cinema to the tune of $58 million) ensured that 93% of its budget ($54 million) was covered by foreign pre-sales, making the film more financially viable. See Amy Taubin, 'Guerrilla Filmmaking on an Epic Scale: *Che*', *Film Comment* 44:5, September-October 2008. Available at: http://www.filmcomment.com/article/steven-soderberg-chereview, accessed 25/09/13. For more on the transnational relationships, marketing efforts and publicity discourse surrounding *Che*, see Gallagher, *Another Steven Soderbergh Experience*, pp. 90-99.

Spanish dialogue.[355] Soderbergh's decision to split the film into two parts derived from a desire to tell more than one story, and he was granted a level of creative control to make a four-hour, Spanish-language biopic due to the film's independent financing structure. Soderbergh says: "When we started, it was going to be a two-hour movie about Bolivia. But when we got further into development, Bolivia without the context of Cuba didn't make a lot of sense."[356] *Che: Part One*[357] employs a non-linear construction that presents a disjointed chronology in contrast to the strict linearity of Guevara's months in Bolivia in *Che: Part Two*, and the transition between colours, tones, shooting styles and aspect ratios bring a stylistic commentary to the narrative that goes beyond a traditional recounting of historical details and events. The film focuses on—but does not explain—the complexities of the man as well as the actions and struggles of revolution.

One tactic Soderbergh employs in his unusual biographical approach is to focus on three key events in the life of Che Guevara rather than attempting to condense or conflate a broad number of episodes. *Part One* tracks the years leading up to and his role in the 1958 Cuban Revolution, from doctor to commandante to revolutionary leader, working alongside Fidel Castro (Demián Bichir). This is interspersed with important scenes of Guevara's testimony before the UN in New York in 1964. *Part Two* details Guevara's unsuccessful Bolivian campaign in 1966-7 and his attempt to

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[355] On the decision to film in Spanish, Soderbergh said: "The language decision we made for two reasons. One, authenticity; and the other thing was that most of our audience is probably going to be outside the US. For those people, doing it in Spanish was going to get us a better result commercially. But it meant no American money. So it's a trade-off." Quoted in Stuart Jeffries, 'Rebel without a pause', *The Guardian* [Online], 16 December 2008. Available at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2008/dec/16/steven-soderbergh-film-che-guevara, accessed 25/09/13.

[356] Anne Thompson, 'Filmmakers find challenges in personal pics', *Variety* 412:5 (15-21 September, 2008), p. 11.

[357] In other territories, such as the US, the films were titled separately as *The Argentine* and *Guerrilla*, but for greater clarity I will use the names *Che: Part One* and *Che: Part Two*, the titles of the UK releases.

kick-start the great Latin American Revolution. This film is more focused on the quotidian, life-or-death decisions that pattern his leadership, showcasing his particular brand of guerrilla warfare through which he became a symbol of idealism and rebellion around the world. In keeping with the figure's Marxist notion of advancement through dialectics the film is divided into two parts, setting up a contrast of two narratives, two colour schemes, two aspect ratios, and two approaches to chronology.

Like *Milk* (2008) and *W.* (2008), *Che* is one of a recent wave of biopics which are unconventional in their approaches to political figures. The presence of these subjects in the mainstream biographical film—once a typically conformist field—is indicative of a series of larger issues at work in the genre. *Che* can also be related to films such as *Good Morning, Night* (2003), *United Red Army* (2007) and *The Baader Meinhof Complex* (2008) that have also dramatised the history of left-wing militant groups in the 1960s and '70s, and *Carlos* (2010), a three-part French miniseries[358] about Ilich Ramírez Sánchez (Édgar Ramírez), known as Carlos the Jackal.

Soderbergh notes the influence of films such as *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), *The French Connection* (1971) and *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* (1971) in forming the aesthetic structure for his earlier film, the crime drama *Traffic* (2000). King sees this as Soderbergh seeking "something of a return to the kind of filmmaking associated with the Hollywood Renaissance […] gestures that contribute to the establishment of a particular position within the wider field of cinematic/cultural production."[359] With *Che*, comparisons can also be drawn with Hal Ashby's *Bound for Glory* (1976), a biopic

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[358] *Carlos* was also released in some territories as a feature film, with a reduced running time of 140 minutes.
[359] King, *Indiewood, USA*, p. 166.

of folk singer Woody Guthrie, both in terms of its humanisation of minority figures (in this case the Dust Bowl refugees) and its use of new cinematographic apparatus (marking the debut of the Steadicam[360]) to create a more fluid narrative and convey its epic breadth.[361] Director of photography Haskell Wexler used soft, muted tones and long lenses to isolate characters from the film's expansive desert landscapes. Similarly, *Che* marks an analogous convergence of *vérité* effects with new technologies in order to add an extra degree of authenticity. Exploiting the new capabilities of digital filmmaking, Soderbergh creates new ways of presenting a biographical story by using the camera to gain proximity to the figure and the prosaic struggles of instigating the idea of revolution, as well as maintaining an objective remove from the man himself. Any form of romanticism is antithetical to Soderbergh's purposes, but Guevara is also only sketchily humanised.[362] Leaving behind his family in Cuba, Guevara decides to pursue his personal project in the jungles of Bolivia. Individual relationships have been edited out of this telling of his life, with Camilo Cienfuegos (Santiago Cabrera), Fidel, and Raúl Castro (Rodrigo Santoro) each getting limited screen time.

While the first film emphasises the communal, collective process, the second is marked by isolated moments of interpersonal conflict—though swiftly and severely quashed—

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[360] Steadicam inventor/operator Garrett Brown conceived the camera system as a way of capturing smooth hand-held action sequences while moving over uneven terrain, or through crowds. See Frank Rush, 'Steadicam® Celebrates its 30th Anniversary at NAB 2005', Tiffen press release (2005). Available at: http://lserv2.dtopinc.com/tiffen/staging_html/tiffen_news_Steadicam30th_Anniv.html, accessed 25/09/13.

[361] As Darren Hughes notes, *Bound for Glory* was also a significant risk for its studio, United Artists, given the film's technical challenges, development problems and script rewrites that contributed to its high budget ($10 million). See Darren Hughes, 'Great Directors – Hal Ashby', *Senses of Cinema* [Online], February 2004. Available at: http://sensesofcinema.com/2004/great-directors/ashby/, accessed 25/09/13.

[362] The film makes only brief mention of Guevara's four children and his marriage to Aleida March (Catalina Sandino Moreno), and his romance with Tamara Bunke (Franka Potente), while hinted at in the first part, is not explored in the second.

that express the failure of the revolutionary movement. In this (and its documentary style), the film displays similarities to *The Battle of Algiers*, itself a significant commentary on guerrilla warfare. While neither film romanticises its characters, the realist visual style of *The Battle of Algiers*—achieved through a combination of black-and-white stock and documentary filming techniques, giving the appearance of newsreel footage—holds greater suspense than *Che*. *Che: Part Two* is especially disjointed and enervating, broken up into chapters that convey the monotony and decline of Guevara's campaign; indeed while the film's intertitles indicate a progression in time (Day 26, Day 100, Day 141, Day 219, Day 340…) there is the sense that the issues he encounters—food shortages, betrayal, desertion, capture, sickness—are part of a continuous and inevitable process.

The film also depicts the physical frailty of Guevara,[363] his asthmatic episodes and frequent illnesses, embodied convincingly by Del Toro. It demonstrates a controlled approach to its subject, but this force-of-will is offset by the film's refusal to become too stringent or rigorous in its character examination. It eschews a hagiographic mythologising of Che as cultural icon by emphasising his ordinary as well his extra-ordinary qualities. In his journey from doctor to political advisor to guerrilla strategist and revolutionary leader, Che is a figure who grows through the challenges he faces and the struggles he overcomes. In its impersonal distancing, the film marks itself out as reluctant to explore the inner workings and motivations of its protagonist. By providing little context for his actions, the film both refuses to delve into the private

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[363] Guevara's health is an element that is dealt with in another biopic, *The Motorcycle Diaries* (2004). Gael García Bernal plays Che as a young man travelling across South America with his friend Alberto Granado (Rodrigo de la Serna) in 1952, several years before he became an iconic Marxist guerrilla and revolutionary.

sphere of the military leader and undermines the public hagiography of its revolutionary hero. It is not enough to look at both Guevara's success and failure, but as we view the figure of Che, we question whether his silence and inaction, suggestive of his stoicism and sagaciousness, is a weakness or a strength.

As both biopic and war film, *Che* leans toward a distanced, contemplative styling, but it also demonstrates divergent approaches to action. Unlike contemporary Hollywood war-film aesthetics—such as those of *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) or *The Hurt Locker* (2009)—that employ features codified in David Bordwell's theory of "intensified continuity",[364] the depiction of small-scale revolutionary tactics and guerrilla warfare emphasise the mismatched nature of the conflict, as well as the confusion, chaos, and disorientation. Optimism is held in higher regard than strategy, but this revolutionary virtue is dependent on fortune and, eventually for Che in Bolivia, luck ran out. This depiction of close, messy combat is also evinced in the second film's refusal to build to archetypal climaxes; even as the first film's triumphal conclusion marks the end of the Cuban Revolution, Che's response as he departs for Havana is, "We won the war, the revolution starts now." This signifies the beginning of a radical process that takes place in the elision between the two films, and cautions against triumphalism; Che remains true to his revolutionary ideals: "Theft has no role in revolution," he cautions, ordering one of his soldiers to return a stolen car. In sharp contrast to the end of *Part One*, *Che: Part Two* is more fragmented and less conventional; if the first film demonstrated the spirit and excitement behind political upheaval, the second exhausts this enthusiasm with its draining, demoralising depiction of guerrilla warfare. As Todd

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[364] Bordwell's theory will be taken up later in this thesis, in relation to the concept of narrative immediacy. See Chapter Two, pp. 174-177.

McCarthy writes in *Variety*, the film is concurrently "intricately ambitious" and "defiantly nondramatic"[365] in the manner by which it conveys the mundane process of revolution.

Visual approaches of digital filmmaking

> "Without any doubt, cinema today is a mixing of art and technology."
> - Vittorio Storaro, cinematographer[366]

The aesthetic approach of *Che* perhaps best exemplifies the variability of digital approaches to visual storytelling (see Figures. 1.23 and 1.24) as both classical film style and documentary realism are incorporated within a single narrative. While a film such as *Public Enemies* highlights the manner in which new styles can be applied to traditional genre models, *Che* addresses alternative attitudes to a biographical subject, with particular semantic traits being associated or identified within the syntactic frameworks of its two parts. On a narrower scale, this is also reflective of Soderbergh's own production practice; writing in *Film Comment*, Amy Taubin states that "[c]ontradiction determines the shape not only of Soderbergh's individual films but also the relationship of one to another. [...] What Soderbergh terms 'the call and response' relation between [*Part One*] and [*Part Two*] is intrinsic to their form and meaning."[367] While both parts used the same digital camera, *Che: Part One* utilised anamorphic lenses, creating a widescreen image that has more of a filmic look. This is combined with the distinct shooting styles of the two parts: *Part One* is composed in a more classical manner, with the camera either fixed or moving on a dolly. Of this style

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[365] Todd McCarthy, 'Che', *Variety* [Online], 21 May 2008. Available at: http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117937244?refcatid=31, accessed 25/09/13.
[366] Quoted in *Side by Side*.
[367] Taubin, 'Guerrilla Filmmaking on an Epic Scale: *Che*'.

Soderbergh says: "I was looking for a more traditional Hollywood frame, […] with classical compositions, a steady camera, vibrant colors, [and] a warm palette."[368] This section shows Che's perspective as he demonstrates his tactical skills, resulting in the ultimate success of the July 26th Movement. Viewing events through the eyes of the victor is an archetypal biographical approach, with the more conventional style adding to its generic conformity.

Taking a divergent approach, *Che: Part Two* used spherical lenses that produce more of a recognisably digital video quality: the images produced by digital cameras are often almost unnaturally sharp, and anamorphic lenses soften the image to reduce this sharpness. This section was shot with a much smaller crew, opting for handheld or tripod camera placement rather than dollies or cranes. The focus on guerrilla warfare informs the film's shooting style in its handheld, pseudo-documentary styling: "I wanted a sense of foreboding," claims Soderbergh, "a […] bit of a jagged quality [and] uneasiness that comes from having the camera on your shoulder and the taller frame, […] and a color palette that was muted."[369] The digital imagery of the second part is more accentuated and, as we shall see with *Public Enemies*, this seems to foreground the immersive quality of the form. There is a shift here from *inviting* an engagement with the central figure to *pushing* the viewer closer to him.

Initially the film displays an austerity in its shooting style, neither isolating nor closely approaching Che but depicting him surrounded by others, addressing comrades in the

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[368] Quoted in Michael Guillen, 'CHE – *The Evening Class* Interview With Steven Soderbergh', *The Evening Class* [Online], 17 January 2009. Available at: http://theeveningclass.blogspot.co.uk/2009/01/che-eveningclass-interview-with-steven.html, accessed 25/09/13.
[369] Ibid.

jungle or challengers at the United Nations, conveying the dedication of the man to his cause. This is also evident in the film's sparing use of close-ups and avoidance of reaction shots, reflecting Guevara's belief in the collective so as not to isolate one man from the many, an effect Soderbergh describes as "un-Che-like."[370] Yet as the second film progresses and Guevara's personal situation worsens, the camera gradually moves in tighter, violating this principle by accentuating his isolation (also evident in Figures. 1.23 and 1.24). Soderbergh describes this practice:

> It was a conscious build. When you look at the trajectory of Bolivia, you understand that he can't go back to Cuba. The CIA has called him the most dangerous man on the planet. At a certain point, he said, "We're either going to have to win or I'm going to die here."[371]

This is increasingly confirmed as Che's group of rebels is encircled by the Bolivian army. The camera here moves in closer to Che, at its tightest the moment before his death when he faces his executioner (Figure 1.25), saying, "Go ahead, shoot. Do it." This is followed by a point of view shot, the only explicit one in the film, as Che is shot, accentuated by the sound of his close, heavy breathing. The image loses focus, tilts sharply, and the camera movement gives the impression of falling to the floor, finally granting an expression of extreme subjectivity as Che is executed (Figures. 1.26-1.28). The manner of Guevara's death—captured and summarily executed without fair trial or appeal—was a major motivator for the telling of this story, according to Del Toro, who compares the death of Che to the execution of a war criminal or a mafia hit.[372] Soderbergh rigorously shows us the outer man, though suffering greater internal agonies in the second film, and implicitly acknowledges the existence of crises within

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[370] Taubin, 'Guerrilla Filmmaking on an Epic Scale: *Che*'.
[371] Ibid.
[372] Simon Hattenstone, 'Dammit, this guy is cool', *The Guardian* [Online], 29 November 2008. Available at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2008/nov/29/benicio-del-toro-che-guevara, accessed 25/09/13.

such a radical figure without pretending to know his emotions or mental processes. By documenting his death in this manner, the film incisively avoids tragedy or hagiography, and his body is covered as he is taken away by helicopter.[373]

Handheld camerawork is often used to create the impression of greater immediacy, leaning towards documentary/*vérité* forms of filmmaking. A sense of immediacy (as explored in greater detail in my chapter on *Public Enemies*) can either seek to present itself as objective or be closely related to character subjectivity and emotional engagement. As Geoff King notes, the impression of handheld camerawork can be mixed:

> In some instances it creates an impression of objective distance, through the fabrication of an effect similar to that achieved by genuine documentary footage, taken unprepared and having to react to the unfolding of events. Unsteady hand-held camerawork of this kind can also create an impression of viewer proximity to the action, however, an "up-close-and-personal" effect, a vicarious impression of subjective participation in the on-screen events.[374]

However, films can utilise both forms of impression as one might conventionally use an establishing shot and a close-up. Furthermore, the immediate reaction to events taking place that King associates with objective distance can also be evoked in the subjective approach that emphasises the confusion of a particular character when confronted with the chaos of action. Digital cameras, due to the weight and size, are better capable of capturing these *vérité* elements, and *Che* demonstrates both forms in an interplay of styles enabled by digital filmmaking. The neutral impression of

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[373] This is not dissimilar from the ending of *Zero Dark Thirty* in which Osama bin Laden (Ricky Sekhon) is shot and killed by a team of United States Navy SEALs in a precise combat operation and taken via helicopter to be identified by team leader Maya (Jessica Chastain).
[374] King, *Indiewood, USA*, p. 166.

observing chaos created by Guevara's attack on the Sierra Maestra barracks (static

camera, steady movement) in *Che: Part One* (Figure 1.29) can be contrasted with the

immersion within the chaos of being attacked by Bolivian forces (shaky camera, whip

pans, image blur, all exacerbated by indistinct sound design) in *Che: Part Two* (Figure

1.30). The unsteadiness of the camera is more pronounced in the second sequence,

furthering the impression of discomfort and disorientation, and the use of jump cuts

and temporal elisions contrasts with the continuity editing of the first example.

With regard to the film's documentary realism, Ben Sachs notes "the way it avoided a

traditional biopic structure to immerse the viewer in historical and geographical

detail," and how "it revelled in the atmosphere of the Bolivian jungle and the original

UN building in New York, trying to re-create his experience by looking long and hard at

the same things he looked at."[375] This sense of recording realistic detail provides an

impersonal view of events from a slightly distanced perspective instead of focusing on

the subjective experience of Guevara himself. The films were largely based on

Guevara's original source material, *Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War* and

The Bolivian Diary of Ernesto Che Guevara.[376] These war narratives are told from a

singular perspective, and Taubin argues that while he articulated and carried his

political cause and ideology within these texts, he also "saw himself and his situation

from the outside."[377]

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[375] Ben Sachs, 'Stripping Steven Soderbergh', *Chicago Reader* [Online], 11 July 2012. Available at: http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/steven-soderbergh-directs-magic-mike-with-channing-tatum/Content?oid=6924148, accessed 25/09/13.

[376] Ernesto Che Guevara, *Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War* (London: Penguin, 1968); Ernesto Che Guevara, *The Bolivian Diary of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1968).

[377] Taubin, 'Guerrilla Filmmaking on an Epic Scale: *Che*'.

Rather than presenting historical facts or well-worn events, Soderbergh is looking to examine the process of the historical moment by framing revolution as a series of instances of confrontation and collaboration, discord and solidarity. Michael Atkinson notes: "Biopic crises, dramatic epiphanies, romantic subplots, psychological insights, ironic sociohistorical markers – all of these are elided."[378] The black-and-white UN footage, for instance, is largely expository, filling in the gap between the two films with unexciting information that addresses some key issues around the Revolution's regime.[379] However, while this underlines the desire for authenticity in the film's form of historical re-enactment, it is not supported by further sequences of drama and revelation, instead serving as a dialectic bridge that connects the two central narratives. There is also little progression in the film, despite the totalising air of revolution, as it is not centred around a series of major events in Guevara's life through which its narrative runs. While Atkinson questions the pedagogical intent of this approach, *Part One*'s coverage of the Cuban Revolution is nowhere near as tedious or banausic as the drawn-out campaign at the heart of *Part Two*. Soderbergh's approach to the film's subject is both ambitious and exhausting in its deliberate refusal to adhere to generic tropes that would allow for traditional audience involvement.

Like other critics, Michael Chanan has questioned the purpose of the film: "It's difficult to see the rationale behind the making of this movie."[380] Yet this seems to be

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[378] Michael Atkinson, 'Che: Part One', *Sight & Sound* 19:1 (January 2009), pp. 57-58.
[379] Soderbergh claims the United Nations content was a way of addressing the controversial events in the immediate aftermath of the Cuban revolution. Instead of addressing his bureaucratic period, Soderbergh was more interested in "making a procedural about guerrilla warfare." See Mark Olsen, 'Soderbergh takes a revolutionary approach to Che', *Los Angeles Times* [Online], 31 October 2008. Available at: http://theenvelope.latimes.com/news/la-et-che1-2008nov01,0,4392866.story, accessed 25/09/13.
[380] Michael Chanan, 'Rebel without a Point', *Sight & Sound* 19:1, pp. 38-9. Other similar responses include Armond White ('On a Revolutionary Road: Che', *New York Press* [Online], 10 December 2008.

Soderbergh's intention, to underwhelm by presenting history—and a historical figure—in this fashion.[381] The film does not explain but merely expresses his humble existence and underlines the fact that he is subject to the same flaws and vulnerabilities as others. Del Toro speaks in interviews of the meticulous efforts taken to research events, yet the result of the filmmaking process was a concerted decision to focus on everything surrounding the events rather than the events themselves.[382] If the result of this approach to history displays an aversion to generic tropes, should this be read as an extension of the assumption that it is the duty of the viewer to bring a certain amount of their own knowledge to provide historical context? The film, after all, does not make any bold statements, disclose political opinion, or reveal new historical evidence. Instead, it presents the procedure of revolution, from its first rumblings to its enacting and its failure, in a way that is both anticlimactic and devoid of historical spectacle.

Biographically, the film works as a portrait of Guevara as a leader through depicting his military campaigns rather than approaching the subject through interrogating his psychology or focusing on his formative years. Soderbergh's aim is to understand the man and his ideas through his actions, but he also saw the difficulties of a biographical approach to this character: "I was drawn to Che as a subject for a movie (or two) not only because his life reads like an adventure story, but because I am fascinated by the

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Available at: http://nypress.com/on-a-revolutionary-road-che/, accessed 25/09/13) and Owen Gleiberman ('Che', *Entertainment Weekly* [Online], 12 January 2009. Available at: http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20250512,00.html?iid=top25-Movie+Review%3A+Che, accessed 25/09/13).

[381] This contradicts the film's advanced publicity in which Soderbergh described his desire to take on the project due to Guevara's impact on young people all over the world, having his image on their walls and t-shirts without knowing who he is. See Chanan, 'Rebel without a Point', p. 39.

[382] See Kieron Corless, 'The Impossible Dream', *Sight & Sound* 19:1, pp. 36-38.

technical challenges that go along with implementing any large-scale political idea."[383]

It appears that the technical challenges faced by Guevara mirror the technological issues that Soderbergh encountered when deciding to shoot the film on digital. This did, however, provide greater stylistic flexibility in terms of how to depict such a culturally significant figure, thereby not forcing the filmmakers to distort history or compromise the character. By positioning its subject at a pronounced remove, the film thus reinforces its thematically objective framework.

Conclusion

Technology is often tied up in discourses around spectacle; for example, David Bordwell states that "Hollywood (from its earliest days) has eagerly employed spectacle and technical virtuosity as a means of artistic motivation."[384] Recent historical films may signal a shift away from spectacle, with digital filmmaking—and the techniques with which it is practised—offering particular artistic motivations that are separate from issues concerning spectacle, though both are motivated by narrative causality. The accomplishments of historical films demonstrate how they operate as works of history that put forth their own theses.

The extent to which *Che* and *The New World* are able to create and shape historical or biographical worlds has advanced through the use of modern filmmaking practices, but while they can be seen to have achieved a richness of detail in recounting events, there is a diminished emphasis on the analysis of the subject. While demonstrating an increased flexibility and acceleration of the filmmaking process, *Che* takes a narrow

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[383] Quoted in '"Che": Festival de Cannes program', 2008. Available at:
http://www.festivalcannes.fr/assets/Image/Direct/025104.pdf, accessed 25/09/13.
[384] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, p. 21.

approach to its subject that is reflected in both a spatial and temporal specificity. This focused (rather than closed-off) approach positions the subject at a pronounced remove, and thus it is plausible for the film to be read as more ethically objective than conventional examples within the biopic tradition. Soderbergh creates a deliberately nondramatic diptych, providing fragments of assorted information and events that form an enigmatic collage of a historical film. It remains distanced and impersonal in its portrayal of Che and his contemporaries, tracking Guevara's movements and actions without subjectivising his point of view, and portraying with varying clarity his management of soldiers in the process of revolution.

The filmmakers involved in both *Che* and *The New World* are concerned and punctilious about historical accuracy, with little cinematic license taken to create an entertainment in terms of a conventional historical spectacle. Stylistically, they diverge in terms of their perspective, with *Che* granting a removed, objective view of living alongside the characters, almost in real-time. Revolution here is brought about by ideas, but it also conveys the daily process of action, showing Guevara not as an indisputable hero but as a human of contradictions. Biopics often display hagiographic qualities, but the film neither follows traditions of the biopic nor glorifies its subject.

The personified yet unascribed perspective is typical of Malick's films, having the effect of questioning whether the unidentified camera presence belongs to a character or an unknown additional character. For Perez, "Personified camera movement imitates the

human gaze moving through space,"[385] and this style feeds into the interplay of fluid consciousness as the camera's perspective could belong to any character or none of them. In *The New World*, the combination of camera movement, discontinuous editing and individual "inner" voiceovers results in an indeterminate, floating—yet collective—subjectivity that provides a broader account of historical experience and recollection, giving us space to reflect on this past. By reworking its historical narrative through these techniques, the film projects a sense of subjective involvement in the past that enhances its form of historical expression. Instead of adhering strictly to the conventional historical record, Malick chooses to convey an interpretation of the human condition through a process of historical imagining. Despite the disparity between the shooting of *The New World* on 35 and 65 mm film and the filming of Steven Soderbergh's *Che* on digital, the films share an impressionistic style, consisting of floating, discontinuous approaches far removed from classical notions of linearity and spatial unification.

Taken together, *Che* and *The New World* address a renewal of popular interest in particular historical periods and figures, as well as offering new aesthetic and narrative structures for their delivery. The process and adoption of new technologies marks a significant chapter in the development of these generic and narrative traits. In both films, a heavy emphasis on period re-creation over both CGI and virtual sets allows for a different form of historical exploration. Free from the restrictions of sets and interiors, the greater range of camera movements lends the films a directness in their visual approaches, anchoring the camera to the characters and subjectively positioning

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[385] Perez, 'How We Remember', p. 27. In contrast, Perez believes Malick's salient, systematic use of jump cuts "imitate the mind's eye looking back in time […] We remember parts more than wholes, and try as we might to fit the parts together, discontinuities remain" (ibid.).

them and their experiences by following their actions more closely. As Rosenstone notes, history can be thought of as a series of conventions for thinking about the past, but it can also be seen as a challenge, provocation or paradox.[386] The distinction between the two films proves that while traditional practices can be utilised and combined to create fresh aesthetic and narrative approaches, new technologies provide the means to contest these conventions, granting filmmakers the ability to enter into, challenge, and engage with historical discourse through a broader range of representational strategies.

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[386] Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, p. 164.

Chapter Two – The Immediate Gangster Hero:
Narrative Immediacy and Historical Reassessment in the Period Gangster Film

The gangster genre was identified during the early years of genre criticism in the 1970s that considered the consistencies of narrative, iconography, and ideology over a wealth of films and produced several key works such as Colin McArthur's *Underworld U.S.A.*, Jack Shadoian's *Dreams and Dead Ends: The American Gangster/Crime Film*, and Eugene Rosow's *Born to Lose: The Gangster Film in America*. Fran Mason suggests that a familiar group of films produced in the 1930s (*Little Caesar* [1931], *The Public Enemy* [1931], and *Scarface* [1932]), referred to as the "classic" narrative or cycle, have "been given a privileged position within the study of the genre as paradigmatic examples of its iconography,"[387] uniting the genre though a dominant set of conventions and semiotic codes. This cycle was forced to deal with the prohibitions imposed on the genre by the Production Code Administration and also by the studios themselves. Early condemnations of the gangster genre were directed at the gratuitous violence, its appetite for sensationalism, and its encouragement of antisocial behaviour. As this chapter examines the historical and biographical gangster film, generic texts take on a new importance in this regard. The gangster film is not a static conceptualisation and its examples do not have to follow obligatory narrative structures, ideological frameworks or sets of iconography. Yet the historical gangster picture frequently returns to these conventions and generic traits as the real-life people and events have had such a pervasive influence on earlier forms of cinematic expression.

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[387] Fran Mason, *American Gangster Cinema: From* Little Caesar *to* Pulp Fiction (Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. xiv.

The approach taken in this chapter seeks to address these issues by positioning *Public Enemies* within a variant of the genre that focuses on its status as a historical film. This is a rather selective process but one that works to reveal the historical progression of this subject area and pays attention to a neglected or overlooked characteristic of the gangster film: its historicity. Due to the fact that texts from the classical (*Little Caesar*, *The Public Enemy*), the revisionist (*Bonnie and Clyde*, *Dillinger* [1973]), and the retro (*Miller's Crossing* [1990], *The Newton Boys* [1998]) gangster cycles are set in the same period—the era of Prohibition and the Great Depression—they tend not to display a diverse range of iconographic features and narrative patterns. However, it is their varied approaches to structuring history and conveying particular semiotic codes through thematic issues such as spatiality, territoriality and wider cultural concerns that prompts the exploration of these figures and their place in the cultural fabric of America. The intention is to study the development of history within the genre that expresses the transformational qualities as they respond to cultural, social, and industrial paradigms over periods of time. This chapter analyses specific manifestations within this range of texts as a way of highlighting their particular concerns and the parameters of the genre as a whole.

A primary concern of this thesis is to incorporate an emphasis on imagery and film aesthetics into both coded narratives of Hollywood genre films and narratives of traditional historiography. This chapter brings together the major concerns of the previous chapter, a convergence of the issues of technology and mythology, in order to examine how they operate together in the historical film, particularly in expressing the immediacy of the past. As conveyed in existing literature, films are full of invisibilities,

and changes in technology make these alternately more and less visible. While digital filmmaking has had a larger influence on all genres in terms of form and style, apparatus and practitioners, not all genres have been affected equally. A particular way of exploring a genre with a marked affect is by studying the example of the gangster film, in part due to the genre's significance on stylistic, historical and social levels. The gangster film is significant because rather than maintaining a continual presence, it tends to present itself cyclically. Academic and popular studies of the gangster film have consistently focused on a small number of well-known films, particularly the classic gangster cycle. This chapter places the cyclical production of gangster films within the broad social, political, and cultural contexts that have, until now, been largely absent from ahistorical and archetypal accounts of the genre, and within the discourses and practices of digital filmmaking. The aim is to reinstate Hollywood gangster films within the material complexity of their production in order to illustrate how they provide audiences with a rich narrative space for the articulation of shifting cultural desires, ideologies, and anxieties, and to show how the gangster figure is produced and represented differently within historical intersections of cultural identity and the fluctuating cultural figurations of criminality.

Advancing cinematic technologies have frequently aimed to provide a more immersive experience, to pull the spectator into the diegesis more forcefully in order to achieve a greater emotional connection or effect. Writing on recent 3D animation, but speaking to trends in contemporary cinema more generally, Robert Neuman draws together technological developments with aesthetics of immersion in order to describe intensified sensory experiences: "Cinema has had a history of innovations that tend

toward higher and higher degrees of immersion," such as widescreen, colour, and multichannel sound.[388] More robust and responsive film emulsions have given way to digital imaging software, devices and displays, and Neuman believes these have "advanced in resolution and dynamic range to make the alternate reality being presented by a filmmaker a more compelling illusion."[389] As Stephen Prince states, "The enduring cultural practice of placing viewers into immersive, virtual spaces came naturally to cinema, with its ability to provide moving images and to combine pictures with sound."[390]

Public Enemies is the most expedient example of the genre from the transitional phase of the large-scale shift from celluloid to digital, and its use of the new format allows us to see a set of changes and contradictions that are not always easy to identify. Advancements and particular applications of film technology often have subliminal effects in that the differences may not be obvious. Like screen ratios, for instance, digital cinema is not alien to our understanding of the form; it may change how films affect us but it does not overtly announce its presence, making these results harder to discuss but also worthy of investigation. As with the transition from black-and-white to colour film, or the move to increasingly spectacular widescreen processes, the digital/film paradigm is conceptually unclear; this shift is both crucial and invisible, and, as with all forms of industry change, there will inevitably be a great deal of concern about the reception of innovation. The directing focus of this work is the study of how digital filmmaking technologies have been employed to create particular aesthetic

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[388] Robert Neuman, '*Bolt 3D*: A Case Study', *Proceedings of SPIE 7237, 72370F* [Online], 2009. Available at: http://spiedigitallibrary.org/proceedings/resourse/2/psisdg/7237/1/72370F_1?isAuthorized=no, accessed 29/10/13.
[389] Ibid.
[390] Stephen Prince, *Digital Visual Effects in Cinema*, p. 186.

techniques that enhance the sense of immediacy in films set in the distant past. The combination of narrative immediacy and digital filmmaking imparts an affect that becomes primarily sensory, creating a text that communicates the complexities and ambiguities inherent in experiencing historical events.

This chapter also uses *Bonnie and Clyde* as a point of comparison in order to analyse the way in which films of the revisionist cycle utilised existing conventions to create new ideological and cultural forms as part of their reconsideration of particular generic codes. Fran Mason states that "gangster films in the period of the 1960s and 1970s often present both replication and revision within the same film text."[391] *The St. Valentine's Day Massacre* (1967), for example, "generates an ambiguous dialectic that places this phase of the genre interestingly between a modernist avant-garde aesthetic and a postmodern loss of critical distance."[392] This phase of the gangster film is of significance due to this dynamic of replication and revision as *Public Enemies* treads similar ground in its employment of a postmodern—though still avant-garde— aesthetic, as well as varying degrees of critical detachment. *Public Enemies* has a related approach to the past taken by *Bonnie and Clyde*, in which intertextuality informs the film's sense of nostalgia for that cinematic era and the period itself, a form of nostalgic replication. This chapter studies how the modern gangster film both reflects on generic history while also revising its view of this history through renewal, in this instance through the application of a digital aesthetic. There is a nostalgic re-evocation and conscious replication of cultural forms but also a reflective quality that comments on the cultural form and contemporary societal forces more generally, an

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[391] Mason, *American Gangster Cinema*, p. xviii.
[392] Ibid.

indexical frame of reference within *Public Enemies* to both classical and post-classical manifestations of the genre.

In its narrative treatment, *Public Enemies* is of great interest for several reasons. Firstly, due to the way the film's digital production context shapes the immediacy of its aesthetic. Secondly, the manner in which the film, as one based on both historical and biographical accounts, reframes the past through this lens of the present, resulting in a more direct engagement with the *experience* of history through its subjectivity and focus on immersion. Finally, given the film's status as a historical gangster film, its relation to prior generic forms is important in terms of how the gangster film has traditionally related itself to its historical context. This chapter aims to work through these three distinct lines of enquiry in order to ascertain the representational and textual strategies involved in forming narratives of such complexity, and to use them to understand how this type of narrative can be read through its historical and generic significances. In positing itself as a self-reflexive example of our own collective historical consciousness (sculpted by a diverse range of media), the film seems to challenge its audience to actively interpret it in order to create a form of immersion within its fully-realised period diegesis. From this, it can be argued that its unique interpretation and treatment of history is created through three key factors:

i)   Period authenticity (historical re-enactment)

ii)   Dramatic license (deliberate deviations from historical fact)

iii)   Digital cinematography (modern aesthetic and technical choices)

Mason believes that any study of a genre that attempts to periodise it by highlighting dominant modes and cycles within particular time stages will be "slightly artificial" because it "entails a process of selection that will always operate some kind of repression, whether this is of films which are anomalous in the context of general tendencies or do not fully fit the methodology."[393] While this is an accurate statement of methodological practice, this chapter is an attempt to convey the mutability of the genre with specific regard to historical accounts of the gangster narrative and changing cinematic aesthetics, as well as the new forms of mainstream production that alter the confrontation with and perception of history.

Narrative immediacy and the digital period aesthetic

While digital effects have been addressed in cinema history in the works of Sean Cubitt, Tom Gunning, and Vivian Sobchack (among many others),[394] Scott Balcerzak and Jason Sperb examine digital effects in relation to larger phenomena of space and the postmodern body. They outline the fact that the "digital" in film was "first notably discussed within the realm of special effects where the Bazinian notions of the cinematic image were clearly being challenged in such series as the *Jurassic Park* movies, the *Matrix* trilogy, the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, and numerous other blockbuster fantasy and science fiction films."[395] Despite the monumental impact of the digital technological revolution on film as both text and culture, little attention has

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[393] Ibid., p. 120.

[394] See Sean Cubitt, *Digital Aesthetics* (1998) and *The Cinema Effect* (2005), Tom Gunning, 'Attractions: How They Came into the World' and 'The Cinema of Attraction[s]: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde' in Wanda Strauven (ed.), *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), pp. 31-40 and 381-388, and Vivian Sobchack, '"Cutting to the Quick": *Techne, Physis* and *Poiesis* and the Attractions of Slow Motion' in Strauven (ed.), *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, pp. 337-351.

[395] Scott Balcerzak and Jason Sperb, *Cinephilia in the Age of Digital Reproduction: Film, Pleasure and Digital Culture* (London & New York: Wallflower Press, 2009), p. 17.

been paid to the new aesthetics and styles that have been developed by those using high definition digital cameras. This is to be distinguished from studies that examine digital special effects or the proliferation of cheap, low-resolution equipment in the world of independent film. My study of these technical forms illuminates the impact they can have on how we relate to cinematic texts, how they mediate history in new and different ways, and how they encourage a reworking of previous forms.

In their introduction to *Cinephilia in the Age of Digital Reproduction*, Balcerzak and Sperb discuss the ephemerality of the digital image. In cinephilic discussions, a major discourse concerns the affective hold the image has on viewers (emotional, intellectual, and nostalgic), but the digital image is one that we can grasp without fear of ruin or degradation. Cinephilic debates often encompass the significance of the shift to digital *re*production, yet the move to digital *production* is equally consequential and perhaps more complex. The digital cinematic image is one of inexhaustible possibility in contrast to the material restrictions of film, and *Public Enemies* can be seen in this light as a digital product. As Belén Vidal states, "The digital memory of the text—the frame as bearer of apparently limitless mnemonic layers of information, now accessible in domestic environments thanks to digital formats—has given new impetus to the driving utopia of the historical film as a genre, within the utopian drive of cinema itself: cinema can *re-live* the past."[396] The focus on how historical films reassess and revision the past through the analysis of production contexts, formal qualities (cinematography, editing) and narrative tropes (immediacy, mythology, the public-private binary) opens up myriad connections and dialogues between cinematic

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[396] Belén Vidal, *Figuring the Past*, p. 203.

traditions, as well as demonstrating the potential for new forms of historical expression.

Given the emphasis placed on how filmmakers want their films to be received, it is important to contextualise this evidence within a larger creative-industrial framework. In his industry study, *Production Culture*, John Thornton Caldwell studies the self-representation, self-critique and self-reflection of the creative industries by examining the direct influence of the practitioners involved. By acknowledging their impact as theorists and/or ethnographers it is possible to account for their roles in creating what Caldwell defines as "critical industrial practices," with the production communities themselves acting as cultural expressions and entities rather than mere producers of mass or popular culture. With reference to Caldwell's paradigm for thinking about industrial self-theorising, digital is a technological development (or, more accurately, a series of developments) that serves to provide a greater range of options—and therefore solutions—to aesthetic or theoretical perspectives. New technologies bring with them their own set of aesthetic possibilities, allowing filmmakers to choose from a broader spectrum of alternatives. As Caldwell states, this requires that filmmakers "must of necessity be versatile and hybrid theorizers, ones that never prejudge the look of a production."[397]

Digital production tools, in their enhanced flexibility, practical fluidity, and ability to use lower light levels and increase depth of field, bring with them cultural codes that are distinct from earlier production tools. Caldwell sees this as delineating between

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[397] John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Culture*, p. 19.

two different modes in the relationship between machines and their operators: with predigital technologies he identifies the "sense that human workers on the set are there to follow and assist machines as the machines do their work," whereas with new production tools he determines a sense that "human workers and operators on the set are choreographed while machines are in place mostly to follow and record the interaction of operators and performers."[398] This shifting of agency and autonomy enabled by technology is integral to the consideration of the impact of new production contexts on the ability to construct and represent different narratives. Whereas earlier production systems depend on a highly stratified labour and craft system, digital filmmaking compresses these hierarchies to the extent that specific job titles—director of photography, camera operator, focus puller, etc.—have less meaning. For instance, on *Public Enemies* the flexibility of the cameras and the adoption of the DV format allowed Michael Mann to take a more hands-on approach, acting as a camera operator as well as his writing, producing and directing duties. As Caldwell asserts, when using digital the task, status and interrelationships of the worker, as well as the cultural significance of the work, "all change depending on how production technologies are used and why."[399] This also relates to Steven Shaviro's study of what he calls "post-cinematic affect," a "structure of feeling" present in new media as filmmaking has been transformed from an analogue process to one of increased digitisation: "Digital technologies, together with neoliberal economic relations, have given birth to radically new ways of manufacturing and articulating lived experience."[400] For Shaviro, then,

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[398] Ibid., p. 152-153.

[399] Ibid., p. 153. Rombes observes a more totalising influence: "Digital cinema foregrounds a tendency that has been unfolding for some time in cinema: the distribution of the concept of the auteur across many fields. Or, to be more precise: today's cinematic auteurs are not the film directors, but interface inventors, creators and designers" (*Cinema in the Digital Age*, p. 133).

[400] Steven Shaviro, *Post Cinematic Affect* (Winchester and Washington: Zero Books, 2010), p. 2.

these changes in new media forms and content coalesce to signify the emergence of a new media regime and a different mode of production.

As opposed to suggesting that digital leads to a dissolution of a film's narrative structure, there is instead a shift towards an intensification of the image wherein it becomes more central, and temporal and spatial dimensions become secondary. Moreover, the absence of a definitive timeline, the shifting between characters and locations, and the film's narrative elisions enhance its immediacy, and its affect becomes primarily sensory by breaking free of narrative space. While the emphasis on the immediate nature of events in *Public Enemies* does not fully take over the narrative, it does lend particular sequences the affective sensation that action is being instantaneously experienced rather than recollected and re-narrativised. The narration of historical events in the present rather than past tense places emphasis on action—on the re-creation of experience—rather than on reaction and interpretation. Immediate narration is appropriate for narratives that wish to relay the intensity and adversity experienced by its protagonists, presenting thoughts in conjunction with actions without reaching finite conclusions. In doing so, narratives are able to present characters' interpretations of events as they take place, thus re-creating their actions and thought processes. By placing primacy on their agency, immediacy aids in the establishment of their autonomy.

In signalling how technological contexts can inform changes in narrative construction, it is important to avoid a technologically deterministic viewpoint that presumes technology drives the development and production of cultural forms. Instead, it is

possible to identify how digital filmmaking practices have been appropriated by filmmakers in particular ways, with digital practices being seen as enhancement tools that make available new forms of stylistic expression. This is in contrast to reading them as enabling radical advancements for artistic creativity. For instance, Janet Harbord criticises the latent technological determinism of theses that propose a shifted structure of perception attributable to cinema—from those of Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer to, more recently, Leo Charney and Anne Friedberg—because we need to understand the different ways in which technology is employed by different filmmakers, and the subsequent audiences that place value on the products themselves.[401] By avoiding the characterisation of the specific and reductive aesthetic attributes of a particular production technology and their application to all the uses of this technology, one acknowledges that digital production has travelled through a range of film cultures—from Dogme and other independent cinemas to modern auteurs, mainstream, and then 3D filmmaking—and has been employed differently in each production context.[402] Digital video is a medium that allows for greater freedom, both logistically and creatively, in affording new aesthetic possibilities, being more flexible at the level of both production and post-production. The flexibility of the format allows for a more continuous, undisrupted shooting process, given the faster reloading and resetting times, and it is typically more cost-effective than shooting on film.

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[401] Janet Harbord, *Film Cultures* (London: Sage, 2002), pp. 32-33.

[402] The choice of using lower-end digital cameras in the age of high definition must then be seen as a conceptual choice as well as an aesthetic one, in revealing and/or enhancing the flaws of the image. Beyond the Dogme movement and its surrounding sphere of influence (Lars von Trier, Harmony Korine, Thomas Vinterberg), this can be seen in the work of Danny Boyle (*28 Days Later*, 2002), Jonathan Demme (*Rachel Getting Married*, 2008), David Lynch (*Inland Empire*, 2006), Steven Soderbergh (*Full Frontal*, 2002), and Michael Winterbottom (*9 Songs*, 2004), as well as that of Michael Mann. Nicholas Rombes sees this as a humanistic resurgence that "acts as a sort of countermeasure to the numerical clarity and disembodiment of the digital code" (*Cinema in the Digital Age*, p. 8).

In *The Language of New Media*, Lev Manovich argues that new media needs to be understood through the historical and cultural paradigms that pre-exist it, and which to an extent determine its shape. The features of digital media help to clarify the distinction between digital and analogue filmmaking. Manovich examines how the digital reconfigures our cultural relationship to the real, with previous forms of capturing or replicating reality (photography, painting) replaced by digitised information. The veracity and ontology of the image is questioned in this process due to the ease of manipulation and the lack of distinction of an original from a computer-based image. Manovich also identifies a shift in practice from the rigidity of camera movements to the fluidity of multiplane animated perspective.[403] This fluidity allows the camera to enter and traverse the space in different ways, thereby displacing the singular perspective and surface features of analogue film.

The focus of Manovich's work is on tracing creative practices developed by the avant-garde onto then-recent filmmaking practices in order to identify their impact and significance. However, the paradigm in which digital mainstream film operates is vastly different today, no longer simply suturing digital effects into a film, but using smaller, more mobile cameras to create new perspectives and explorations of interiority, thus causing a formal disruption through more fluid forms of production, distribution, and spectatorship. Harbord, however, argues that "digital media remains within the bounds of the film text itself,"[404] retaining the singularity of film culture characteristic of a modernist narrative. Here, digitalisation "facilitates formal

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[403] Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, pp. 293-302.
[404] Harbord, *Film Cultures*, p. 148.

experimentation, the questioning of cinematic premises of linear narrative, perspective and veracity through the dimensions of the text."[405]

Michael Mann and the digital

Opening in 1933—"the golden age of bank robbery," as the opening titles state—*Public Enemies* details the last few months in the life of Depression-era outlaw John Dillinger (Johnny Depp), a criminal who became Public Enemy No. 1 for J. Edgar Hoover (Billy Crudup) and his newly-formed Bureau of Investigation. As he and his gang are pursued across several Midwest states by agent Melvin Purvis (Christian Bale), Dillinger initiates a romantic relationship with coat-checker Billie Frechette (Marion Cotillard). Ultimately, he is tracked down in Chicago, shot and killed by Purvis' agents outside the Biograph Theater in July 1934. The film's structure is one of constant movement and flux, informing the temporal concerns of its narrative in the manner by which history itself appears to be catching up with the figure of Dillinger. In avoiding elegy and sentimentalism in favour of a nuanced, historicised account, the film emphasises the presentness of experiencing the past and pushes for a deeper level of immersion in its period diegesis.[406]

The period gangster film is a highly focused form of the genre, yet this does not diminish the expansive filmmaking possibilities involved in reworking or operating

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[405] Ibid.

[406] This form of historical realisation and condensation also extends to the period film; for instance, Belén Vidal's analysis of the opening sequence of *Pride & Prejudice* (2005) demonstrates that "the conjunction of mobile framing and dynamic staging within the frame stresses the immersion in the past as a sensory experience" (*Figuring the Past*, p. 13). Not only is narrative progression secondary to the visual expression of the past, but it is further condensed or subjugated in order to provide a deliberate lack of context. The minimal introduction of historical events and figures focuses the narrative on the present moment rather than its pastness.

outside of generic conventions. The genre has its own history as well as being formed *from* history, and for this reason it must be negotiated differently while maintaining a certain degree of generic conformity. In his consideration of Mann's canon, Steven Rybin believes that each film "is locatable in a distinctive film-historical genre lineage" and his style "serves as a conduit through which genre is inflected, innovated, and reformulated."[407] *Public Enemies* marks a significant point within Mann's oeuvre in that it joins together several cinematic and historical concerns: it focuses on a historical figure within a tumultuous period of America's past; it draws from the long history of the gangster genre, both classical and revisionist; and it signifies the application of Mann's recently developed digital filmmaking practices and aesthetics which reformulate and reframe the way in which a gangster film can be represented both visually and within a historical framework.

Alongside filmmakers such as Danny Boyle, David Fincher and Steven Soderbergh, Michael Mann is a director who has actively engaged in new technologies to enhance his production practices. In shifting his attention to digital video for both film and television productions, such as *Robbery Homicide Division* (2002-03), *Collateral* (2004), and *Miami Vice* (2006), Mann has employed this technology to form increasingly spare and immediate narratives. Despite Mann's reputation as an advocate of digital capture, during initial consultations with cinematographer Dante Spinotti he planned to shoot *Public Enemies* on 35 mm: "In our early discussions, Michael mentioned several times that he was thinking of going back to film," recalls Spinotti. "He was considering it, I think, because he initially envisioned classical, more set-in-stone kind

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[407] Steven Rybin, *The Cinema of Michael Mann* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), p. 3.

of imagery. We spent a lot of time discussing the pros and cons."[408] Having conducted

tests of both formats, Mann asserted that the celluloid footage looked like a period

film, whereas the digital material gave the impression of presentness, of being alive in

1933: "In the end it made total sense: video looks like reality, it's more immediate, it

has a *vérité* surface to it. Film has this liquid kind of surface, feels like something made

up."[409] The level of control over the image was integral to creating an immediate

aesthetic, together with the format's realism and uniformity, achieved through a

variety of technical aspects: control over focus and depth of field, and direct

manipulation of the image, such as colour timing and saturation. Spinotti states that

he and Mann "believed digital would facilitate a more dynamic use of film grammar"

while providing "a hyper-realistic look." "We wanted the look of *Public Enemies* to

have a high level of realism," he says, "not an overt period feel. Among the historical

aspects are a lot of action, romance and drama, and Michael and I talked about

achieving an immediate feel."[410]

There is an important change of emphasis here in moving from celluloid to digital, with

the filmmakers looking to achieve a definitive sense of immediacy rather than that of a

historical film, thus creating a tension between the modern storytelling tools and the

historical nature of the narrative. The three films that Michael Mann has shot in the

HD format (*Collateral*, *Miami Vice*, *Public Enemies*) have a noticeable and recognisable

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[408] Dante Spinotti quoted in Jay Holben, 'Big Guns', *American Cinematographer* [Online], July 2009.
Available at: http://www.theasc.com/ac_magazine/July2009/PublicEnemies/page1.php, accessed
29/10/13.
[409] Michael Mann quoted in John Patterson, 'Number one with a bullet', *The Guardian* [Online], 26 June.
Available at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2009/jun/26/interview-michael-mann-public-enemies,
accessed 29/10/13.
[410] Spinotti quoted in Holben, 'Big Guns'.

aesthetic that has evolved into one of Mann's central visual signifiers. While more refined and higher-specification cameras are now available,[411] Mann's films look as if they were shot on digital video rather than attempting to replicate the *feel* of film: the depth of field extends further, while action and movement often appears rather jarred or fragmented. Deep staging works to amplify the focal points of the shot, with rack focusing frequently employed to subtly draw the long shot and extreme close-up together, demonstrating the visual impact and dramaturgical importance of both.[412] For instance, when Homer Van Meter (Stephen Dorff) alerts Dillinger to the police presence during the first bank robbery his face is isolated in the frame (Figure 2.1), followed by racking focus to Dillinger, staged at the far end of the bank interior (Figure 2.2), shifting attention to the background then returning to the foreground. The film's visual distinction is evident from the very start of *Public Enemies*, beginning *in medias res* as Dillinger stages an audacious prison break-in and escape, capturing details such as the reflections on the surface of Dillinger's car and the clouds in the sky with startling clarity (Figures 2.3 and 2.4). This distinction is achieved in part due to the intentional underlighting of scenes to create a more realistic tone by picking up extensive detail in low light situations, yet this is undercut by the motion of the handheld camera and the sharp shifts of focus. These stylistic contradictions expose Mann's ostentatious use of the camera as a *digital* tool that informs a particular aesthetic choice, one that operates alongside the specific practical and financial benefits offered by the format.

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[411] The Arri Alexa, Red Epic and Red One are most frequently used today for both large and small productions, demonstrating how fast camera technology has developed over the past few years.

[412] This relates to Pierre Sorlin's observation concerning the more common usage of the close-up in television where it serves the purpose of "hailing" the audience and "refocusing" their attention in a manner unfamiliar to the classical feature film where spectatorial concentration seems to be a point of dependence. Sorlin, 'Television and the Close-up: Interference or Correspondence?' in Elsaesser and Hoffman (eds.), *Cinema Futures: Cain, Abel or Cable?*, pp. 119-126.

The Sony CineAlta F23 was eventually chosen as the main camera with which to shoot the film, in part due to the sharpness of the image and its increased depth of field, despite a slight loss of resolution.[413] The decision was made in order to satisfy the specific needs of capturing, in the most realistic fashion, the look of 1930s America: "To do a historical period film right […] you need to push the limits on picture quality, detail, depth of field and exposure,"[414] says co-producer/second unit director Bryan H. Carroll. Approximately 95 per cent of the film was shot using the Sony F23, with the Sony PMW-EX1 used for shots that required increased mobility, such as the interiors of planes and cars during high-speed chases. The camera was also able to shoot in low-light situations due to its increased elasticity and higher light sensitivity.[415] The film's night-time action and exteriors were important factors in formulating the practical approach to shooting these scenes and making use of complex lighting set-ups. A good example of the complex lighting set-ups for the film relates to the flashes of light from the machine guns; Spinotti says: "They emitted a lot of light from the front of the barrels, so they were all practical and would light the scene, or at least the faces of the actors."[416] During Purvis' late night ambush on Little Bohemia, a small lodge in Manitowish Waters, Wisconsin at which Dillinger and his gang are hiding following a

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[413] The film was largely shot using the Sony CineAlta F23, but also employed the Sony HDC-F950 and the Sony PMW-EX1. The F23 is described by its makers as a high-end camera that gives content creators and programme producers "an extremely versatile, pristine-quality production tool," offering "technical and mechanical flexibility… as well as a compact and rugged design to withstand the challenging conditions often encountered on location" (Sony F23, http://www.sony.co.uk/biz/product/hdcamsrcamcorders/f23/overview, accessed 29/10/13). The film also made minor use of non-digital cameras, namely the Arriflex 235 and the Arriflex 435, small, lightweight cameras designed for handheld and remote applications.

[414] Bryan H. Carroll quoted in Tom Di Nome, 'Sony F23 Cameras Recreate History in "Public Enemies", from Acclaimed Filmmaker Michael Mann'. Sony press release [Online], 02 July 2009. Available at: http://ebookbrowse.com/sony-f23-camera-on-public-enemies-final-pdf-d73164044, accessed 29/10/13.

[415] Holben, 'Big Guns'.

[416] Spinotti quoted in Debra Kaufman, 'DP Dante Spinotti on *Public Enemies*', *Studio Daily* [Online], 01 July 2009. Available at: http://www.studiodaily.com/2009/07/dpa%E2%80%9Aa-dante-spinotti-on-public-enemies/, accessed 29/10/13.

bank robbery, the flashes of light emitted from the barrels of the machine guns serve to light the faces of the actors (Figure 2.5). The punctuations of gunfire during the pursuit briefly cast a strong light on objects in the frame, contributing to the kinaesthetic quality of this night-time chase sequence and granting the image a heightened level of realism.

Though this seems to be an unconventional aesthetic approach, Spinotti applied a similar philosophy when filming *L.A. Confidential* (1997). He notes that director Curtis Hanson said to him: "Let's create this world of *L.A. Confidential*, and let's give great attention to the detail of the period, but then let's put it all in the background and let's shoot it as if it were a contemporary movie. So that the audience forgets that they're watching a period movie and what they're aware of are the characters and the emotions."[417] In this manner, the visual construction of the film avoids evoking nostalgia because it does not resemble the aesthetics associated with films of the 1950s, and also creates a strong link with the present by establishing contemporaneous themes of economic expansion and postwar optimism. By going to great lengths to ensure period details were accurate and precise, and then relegating them to the background, the film emphasises its realistic-ness by not stressing the mise-en-scène;[418] this approach also applies to the lighting set-ups, in contrast to the stylised lighting of classic films noir that creates long shadows and chiaroscuro tonal contrasts that act as expressionistic devices. This example shows that, while this realisation of period realism is not unique, the application of modern digital

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[417] Curtis Hanson quoted in Amy Taubin, 'L.A. Lurid', *Sight and Sound* 7:11, November 1997), p. 8.
[418] An observation regarding the practicality of digital filmmaking: with high definition cameras enabling such great depth of field, backgrounds typically contain much greater detail as they are constantly in focus. In response to this, the mise-en-scène has increasingly become populated by natural, extraneous objects rather than artefacts that have specific narrative or dramatic purpose.

technology to the filming of *Public Enemies* amplifies this effect, accentuating the distance between past and present through its more disjunctive formal style. Central to this is the subliminal impact of "digital realism" examined later in this chapter.

The digitisation of this era transforms imagery into images by taking something intended to be both historically accurate and presciently relevant, and transmuting it into a hyperreal representation of the past that is separate from what is traditionally depicted. This digression from reality is parenthetical, and thus requires further examination. As examined in later sections of this chapter, the gangster genre is one that necessitates conventions, and the 1930s gangster is inextricably linked to cinema. As a gangster picture, *Public Enemies* necessarily proceeds from certain conventions, but it deviates massively from a general cinematic principle of shooting period films on celluloid in the established classical tradition. Michael Mann goes to great lengths to illustrate his intentions for the film, and underlines how *Public Enemies* derives from both his and Dillinger's life experiences. Confronted with the director's attitudes and beliefs, writer F.X. Feeney believes that "Mann doesn't want to be explained, categorized or even 'understood' – he wants to be *experienced*."[419] This statement summarises the presentation of character, the relation between myth and history, and the digital aesthetic of *Public Enemies* that will be analysed here.

The stylistic departures of *Public Enemies* can be identified by contrasting it with other gangster films from the same production period. Indeed, its visualisation of the past as the absolute present is so challenging because of the extent to which we, as viewers,

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[419] F.X. Feeney, *Michael Mann* (Köln and London: Taschen, 2006), p. 21.

have absorbed and anticipate the fabricated reality of classical film style in its aesthetics and editing strategies, especially concerning historical narratives. *Road to Perdition* (2002), for example, conforms to classical film style in terms of its emphasis on consummate production design and a muted colour palette, with cinematographer Conrad L. Hall using dark backgrounds and sets to give it a desaturated, noirish quality.[420] The film's stylised lighting used low levels of light to produce heavy shadows, creating a greater sense of contrast through chiaroscuro. It also features largely symmetrical shot compositions and steady camera movements, achieved through the use of dollies and cranes, as well as maintaining a narrow depth of field. Clint Eastwood has employed a similarly classical film style in his recent period pieces, such as *Changeling* (2008), a drama set in 1920s Los Angeles, and *J. Edgar* (2011), a biopic of Hoover that covers the period 1919-1972. Rob Lorenz, producer of *J. Edgar*, suggests that the film, in its classical style and with Eastwood's traditionalist approach, represents "the way they used to make movies," being "heavily dependent on proper art direction and practical techniques."[421] Figures 2.6 and 2.7 demonstrate how both *Road to Perdition* and *Changeling* introduce the cites in which they are based (Chicago and Los Angeles) through familiar establishing shots—assisted by visual effects[422]—that highlight details of the period milieu, largely through the fashions, automobiles, and architectural styles. Furthermore, these serve to emphasise the extent to which

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[420] See Ray Zone, 'Emotional Triggers', *American Cinematographer* [Online], August 2002. Available at: http://www.theasc.com/magazine/aug02/perdition/index.html, accessed 29/10/13.

[421] Rob Lorenz quoted in Michael Goldman, 'Stepping into the Shadows', *American Cinematographer* [Online], December 2011. Available at: http://www.theasc.com/ac_magazine/December2011/JEdgar/page1.php, accessed 29/10/13.

[422] Stephen Prince uses *Changeling* and *Zodiac* as examples of digital effects being compatible with naturalistic film style, describing them as "low-key, naturalistic films that anchor their period dramas in a strongly-evoked depiction of historical place and time" (*Digital Visual Effects in Cinema*, p. 222). While both feature extensive visual effects—created digitally—they are utilised to achieve a desired patina of realism rather than to create spectacle. The intensive nature of the digital effects causes them to remain as inert, subliminal elements that add depth, detail and context.

our visual impressions of the period are almost entirely dictated by the cinematic representations of the time. This classical stylistic approach has also been taken in another recent gangster text, the HBO television series *Boardwalk Empire* (2010—), set during the Prohibition era. Shot on Super 35, the series also favours dolly and crane shots over the use of Steadicam as pilot director/executive producer Martin Scorsese didn't want movement to be "too noticeable," and it avoids a vibrant palette in order to "quietly capture the tone of the period and support the story."[423]

In *Public Enemies*, digital is utilised to complement the immediacy and thematic principles of the narrative, unveiling different narrative dimensions in the atypical visual presentation of the period. Of this, Mann says:

> I shot in HD for a reason. My objective wasn't to have people look at a period film, I wanted the audience to be involved in the film. I wanted it to feel like it had all the complexity of what it was like in that period of time. I didn't want people to watch it from a distance, I wanted them to have an intimate connection to those times and for those times to have an impact on people.[424]

It is interesting to note that Mann speaks of intimacy and impact when referring to digital video, as if he has been freed from the restrictions of film, suggesting that the format allows for a greater level of experimentation and improvisation. The film's use of style seems to be born out of a desire for a form of realism not usually found within the genre—that of historical rather than social realism—with the shift to digital

[423] Patricia Thomson, 'Mob Money', *American Cinematographer* [Online], September 2010. Available at: http://www.theasc.com/ac_magazine/September2010/BoardwalkEmpire/page1.php. , accessed 29/10/13.
[424] Michael Mann quoted in 'Michael Mann's HD defence', [Online], 2009. Available at: http://entertainment.stv.tv/film/106091-michael-manns-hd-defence/, accessed 29/10/13.

supporting the break from generic visual norms.[425] The effect of this style can be both

impactful but also considerably jarring, especially for those who have not encountered

or are not accustomed to the experience of digital productions, setting up a dichotomy

between immersion and distraction in a beguiling paradox of image and spectatorial

interaction. Mann avoids the visual and folkloric iconography of both the classical

gangster era and its revisionist phase:[426] he states that the use of high definition

"determined the range of choices on the surfaces of everything: set decoration,

wallpaper, fabrics, clothes, everything."[427] While recent depictions of this era have

employed shallow depth of field and static camera positioning or fixed motion to

emphasise the artistry of set decoration and period costuming, it is the plethora of

detail in the mise-en-scène that adds to the film's verisimilitude in order to present a

more abundant, immersive version of the past.

Narrative immediacy and the gangster film

In recent years a tendency has emerged in filmmaking centred around an increased

focus on the direct or instant involvement of viewers in diegetic action through

"immediate" narratives that emphasise the pressing, instantaneous nature of events

as achieved through a broad spectrum of aesthetic practices. I employ the term

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[425] The realism of the classical gangster cycle, for instance, was part of a concerted attempt to address the real social problems and experiences of the Depression era for audiences. See 'The Enemy Goes Public' in Munby, *Public Enemies, Public Heroes*, pp. 39-65; 'Modernity and the Gangster Film' and 'The Post-Code Gangster: Ideology and Social Conscience' in Mason, *American Gangster Cinema*, pp. 1-50, and 'The Golden Age' in Shadoian, *Dreams and Dead Ends*, pp.29-61.

[426] For instance, *Public Enemies* eschews the iconography and vernacular established by the Warner Bros. and RKO gangster films of the 1930s and '40s in favour of a more historical account of Dillinger's last few months. In doing so, it also avoids the straightforward biographical approach of progenitors such as *Dillinger* (1945) and *Dillinger* (1973) or nostalgic mythologies like *Bonnie and Clyde*. A good example of its closer adherence to historical record is the representation of Anna Sage (Branka Katić)—known as the "Lady in Red"—who betrayed Dillinger by informing the Bureau of his whereabouts and accompanying him to the Biograph. In actuality, she wore an orange skirt, and the depiction of this in the film thus serves to refute the Dillinger mythology.

[427] Michael Mann quoted in Patterson, 'Number one with a bullet'.

immediacy to refer to narratives in which various representational strategies are employed to reduce the gap between experience and interpretation. This consists of narrative and stylistic techniques that work to create a sense of subjectivity, typically establishing autonomy through placing primacy on the agency of the protagonist rather than experience being constructed through the interpretative influence of a distanced first- or third-person narrator. Narrative immediacy also relates to identity formation in that the spontaneity of narrative events establishes both the impulsiveness and vulnerability of the protagonist, resulting in a specific form of character affiliation. This can be seen in a range of genres from the action narratives of *Apocalypto* (2006) and *Act of Valor* (2012) to found-footage dramas such as *127 Hours* (2010) and *End of Watch* (2012). The exact qualities of immediacy derive from a style in which lines of narration and experience are compressed to form a diegesis that advances both an emotional and experiential proximity to its characters. The desire for narrative immediacy, as reimagined by proponents of digital filmmaking, is implicitly connected to Bazin's notion of film's drive toward realism, advancing film viewing experiences to achieve a greater sense of immersion.[428] Rather than the spatial immersion of 3D cinema, handheld digital camerawork in the historical film brings a sense of temporal liveness that comes closer to the Bazinian cinematic ideal concerning realism.[429] Of course, the sensation of immediacy is itself difficult to

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[428] This concept is studied in the Literature Review. See Bazin, 'The Myth of Total Cinema' in *What Is Cinema? Volume 1*.

[429] For Rombes, the first-person, subjective realism of this style is "narcissistic, and thus tragically human" in its motion and composition, reflecting the flaws, interruptions and inaccuracies of human perception (*Cinema in the Digital Age*, p. 22). If we accept that any representation of the past, visual or otherwise, is inevitably inaccurate, insistent and disputable, then it makes sense to depict the present experience of the past in a manner that relates and communicates its humanistic imperfections. This also relates to Gilles Deleuze's views on *cinéma vérité* (see Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta [London: Athlone Press, 1989], p. 148); handheld cinematography presents the world in a different way to the formalism of classical film style, thus

define, being an effect that filmgoers experience entirely subjectively, and this needs to be further unpacked. Immediacy can be read as both a representational strategy and a narrative technique; more specifically, historical immediacy is used to reflect the continuous condition of experiencing past events, as well as a method by which to explore the complex nature of historical or biographical subjects.

In *Production Culture*, Caldwell identifies a set of technical practices that demonstrates an "immersive urge" in production worker self-representations, technical design and onscreen style. More specifically, he sees the design and use of these tools as serving the "desire to move deeply into the image."[430] Digital cameras, in their design and employment, can achieve even greater immersive forms of spatial experience, and Caldwell believes that this "appetite for immersion" has "stimulated research and development in contemporary camera design."[431] My approach involves examining how these immersive practices—the probing camerawork, the use of handheld operating systems, and tendencies towards tighter framing and utilising greater depth of field—have had an effect on historical narratives by entering into and moving within the highly-specific, deep space of the past. Caldwell seems to assert that in order to achieve greater immersion there must be a disconnection between camera and operator, a detachment that is evident in the range of autonomous and highly mobile camera eyes that cinematographers operate remotely from a distance. Rather than shifting away from human-scale subjectivity to a variety of "disembodied, highly

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expressing a philosophical intent through its aesthetic by relying on the spontaneity of action and emotion.
[430] Caldwell, *Production Culture*, p. 167. In his study, Caldwell focuses on the impact of the "video assist" and the Steadicam in enabling immersive production styles.
[431] Ibid.

mobile, autonomous, aerial camera-eye configurations,"[432] I would argue that digital

cameras have allowed for embodied subjectivity on a more realistic scale, one that

comprises features of mobility and autonomy but that also communicates the implicit

relationship between camera eye and operator eye.[433] However, while *Public Enemies*

used a more cost-effective and expeditious format for shooting and editing, unlike TV

productions this did not result in a cheaper or faster production, with the film taking

80 days to shoot and costing $100 million.[434] Despite the reduction of costs in terms of

equipment (dollies/cranes), lighting, and negative fees, the film was shot on location in

several cities in Illinois, Wisconsin and Indiana (including many historical sites),

featured an ensemble cast with three star leads, and had a historical setting that

demanded particular attention to art and set decoration as well as period costuming

and makeup. So, while Caldwell identifies how digital can result in speedier and more

cost-effective productions (analogous to digital postproduction practices), in the case

of *Public Enemies* the adoption of new digital filmmaking technologies has not been

combined with a radical change in production practice, in part due to the film's status

as a Hollywood blockbuster and its cost-intensive historical narrative.

Imbuing the gangster genre with immediacy requires a complex restructuring of its

visual tropes. The primary aesthetic strategy with which particular historical moments

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[432] Ibid., p. 169.

[433] The mobile digital camera also creates a style that shortens the distance between reality and representation, and thus narrows the space between image and viewer. In 'On Style', Susan Sontag states that "all works of art are founded on a certain distance from the lived reality which is represented. This 'distance' is, by definition, inhuman or impersonal to a certain degree; for in order to appear as a work of art, the work must restrict sentimental intervention and emotional participation, which are functions of 'closeness'" (Susan Sontag, 'On Style' in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* [New York: Picador, 1966], p. 30). If recent digital styles have narrowed this gap, they also have the potential to bring the past closer to the present through depicting historical events and figures in a more human and proximal fashion.

[434] '*Public Enemies*', Box Office Mojo [Online]. Available at: http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=publicenemies.htm, accessed 22/05/13.

can be brought to vivid life is characterised in *Public Enemies* by spontaneous perspectives and the camera's fluidity of expression that lend its historical re-creations greater power. The use of the terms "realism", "immediacy", and "hyperrealism" have some virtue on a descriptive level, but their theoretical relations with film are complex. As Christopher Williams notes, both realist and anti-realist arguments are mutually interdependent as they are both committed to notions of truth. While not personally asserting that film is a truthful illusion, Williams does comment that "[r]ealism is defined as coherence; the internal truth of varying sets of conventions."[435] By tracing the complex relationship between aesthetics and technology through the ideas of several critics and filmmakers (Jean-Louis Comolli, Jean Epstein, Jean Renoir, Roberto Rossellini), Williams iterates both the reciprocal reproduction of film and life, and the fact that the concept of realism in cinema is always contingent on defining itself against previous styles. Thus, when filmmakers suggest that digital video is a "more real" system of capturing images and action, they see it as allowing them to create a more accurate depiction of the past. The opposition Spinotti suggests between "realism" and a "period feel" is a distinction that suggests that a period film does not sufficiently capture the intricacies of the past, perhaps because it is too mediated, idealistic, or bounded by genre conventions and classical film style.

The status of films as documents—ones narrated and received by no one person in particular—links them only indirectly to the realities they are supposed to be documenting: for Williams, films fulfil a realist function by "tell[ing] their truths within

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[435] Christopher Williams, *Realism and the Cinema* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul for the British Film Institute, 1980), p. 79.

the framework of the particular set of languages available to them."[436] In this process,

filming equipment can be seen as an obstacle to achieving this realism which has

resulted in investment in "ever smaller and more manageable equipment that can be

handled by fewer and fewer people."[437] While this can be seen in the production scale

of *Public Enemies*, with the increased flexibility of digital production incorporated

within both the film's style and the immediacy of its narrative, its aesthetic conflict is

not generated by the distinction between "the characteristics of the material itself and

the manner of filming it," that Williams identifies, but by the clash between the film's

modern aesthetic and its period setting. This notion intersects with Philip Rosen's

argument drawn from his comparison of the "explicit artifice of the Hollywood musical"

with the "serious" historical film. He states that the former is explicit in its cinematic

virtuosity and artificiality, thus authorising the spectator to evaluate its construction,

whereas the latter is a closed diegetic universe of referentiality. However, he further

claims that the historical can also "authorize a variable range of spectatorial give-and-

take whereby the spectator, far from being necessarily overwhelmed by a plethora of

reality-effects, may feel authorized to assert knowledge by challenging the accuracy of

those effects."[438] This suggests that new forms of representation—and in different

genres—can conceive a more "active" appropriation and involvement in the screen

text.

Digital realism relates to the way we relate what we see on screen to what we see in

real life; both concern individual perception. Nicholas Rombes sees traditional

cinematic syntax, such as shot selection, crosscutting, montage, fades, dissolves,

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[436] Ibid., p. 6.
[437] Ibid., p. 7.
[438] Rosen, *Change Mummified*, p. 346.

ellipses and other filming and editing strategies, as "responses not to a certain way of seeing images, but to a certain way of making them."[439] In contrast to these "expressions of technology," digital images and compositions more accurately reflect expressions of reality in that digital technologies make "moving images more natural in the sense that they correspond more closely than ever before to our experience of everyday reality."[440] For Lisa Purse, the aesthetic characteristics of sequences of mundane action "recall the contingent framings and lighting of observational cinema," an important reference point for films invested in "authentically" documenting past events.[441] In recent historical cinema there is a similar juxtaposition between ordinary, everyday moments and our extra-textual knowledge of particular historical events that is motivated by particular aesthetics and film styles. The use of natural lighting and handheld camerawork do not immediately result in a total reversioning of lighting and mise-en-scène styles, but may position characters, actions and objects in a more natural manner; yet while it seems more naturalistic in terms of its interpretation of light and objects, it also makes viewers aware—and indeed constantly reminds them— of the technology involved in making its depiction of reality possible. In attempting to depict events informally, digital films have a tendency to draw attention to the makeup of its formalism, and this is the fundamental paradox of the digital. This dilemma relates to the dialectic between immediacy and what Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin call "hypermediacy", a paradigm that describes how the push in new media technologies to create greater immediacy and presence within the text

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[439] Rombes, *Cinema in the Digital Age*, p. 21.
[440] Ibid.
[441] Purse, *Digital Imaging in Popular Cinema*, p. 1. Purse uses the example of *United 93* (2006), a dramatization of the unsuccessful plane hijacking on 11 September 2001, observing that the brief, mobile takes of the handheld camera, working with available light, grant a sense of intimacy, "observing the passengers' private moments as well as their public interactions" (ibid.).

frequently provokes an awareness of the construction of the artifice.[442]   This hypermedial reminder of the technologies involved in creating a media text subsequently counters its immersive intent, and highlights the mediation of the "realistic" experience.[443]

Mann's conception of realism seems to result from a combination of historical re-creation, dramatic re-enactment, and dedicated research, but is compromised (to an extent) by the artifice inherent in digital production, such as the heightened detail of the image, the movement and positioning of the camera, and the style of editing.[444] This set of theoretical and practical contradictions is central to what makes *Public Enemies* such an intriguing example of both historical cinema and the gangster genre.[445]   Rybin explores this dynamic, identifying an uneasy balance between the

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[442] Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), pp. 31-44.

[443] In a way, this issue of artifice making viewers aware of the technology involved in making the film reflects Charles Acland's argument about IMAX films. "Unlike conventional cinema," Acland states, "it is impossible to forget you are watching IMAX technology" (Charles Acland, "IMAX Technology and the Tourist Gaze," *Cultural Studies* 12:3 [1998], p. 431). In the case of new digital filmmaking, there is less of an awareness of the technology, but a heightened sense that it simply does not look like "conventional" cinema. This is, however, being counteracted by the diminished number of films being released that were shot (and projected) on celluloid, and the technological advancements that have pushed digital camera systems to capture the richness and vibrancy of film.

[444] Regarding the relationship between realism and technology, Michael Allen notes, "The drive behind much of the technological development in cinema since 1950 has been towards both a greater or heightened sense of 'realism' and a bigger, more breathtaking realization of spectacle" (Michael Allen, 'From *Bwana Devil* to *Batman Forever*: Technology in contemporary Hollywood cinema', in Steve Neale and Murray Smith (eds.), *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* [London and New York: Routledge, 1998], p. 127).

[445] There are, however, significant antecedents to this style that has been amplified and extended through digital filmmaking practices. Linda Robinson, for instance, has examined how Martin Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence* (1993) introduced a new spectacle into historical cinema through the double logic of remediation ('*The Age of Innocence* in the Age of Cinematic Remediation', conference paper delivered at Film and Media 2013: 'The Pleasures of Spectacle', 29 June 2013). Employing Bolter and Grusin's immediacy/hypermediacy system that expresses contemporary culture's simultaneous desire to both take pleasure in media as media and to erase all traces of mediation. The manner by which *The Age of Innocence* disrupts the viewer experience through drawing attention to a variety of cinematic devices (voiceover, focused sound and lighting, elaborate camera movements, rapid editing) is in contrast to the traditional classicism of the period film. This mediated layering both breaches the authenticity of history and acknowledges the artifice of the text, though to a far lesser degree than digital films such as *Public Enemies*. These more recent forms of expression may prove more influential on contemporary

acknowledgment of a film's own artificial construction and Mann's personal interest in presenting the realistic detail of the carefully researched dramatic situations:

> His realism hones up to its artificiality, and in fact any trace of the "real" in Mann derives from the power generated by this very quiet acknowledgment, in the films themselves, of the artificial construction that comprises any work of art. But at the same time Mann has remained thoroughly interested in presenting the more or less realistic detail of the dramatic situations he has carefully researched and he is committed to a belief in logical character psychology. The result is rather a kind of amplification of a certain sense of reality presented within and through the bounds of genre, a reality which cannot exist outside of the image itself and which is enabled by convention, but which nonetheless has its moorings in a particular understanding of the world outside of film.[446]

Rybin here draws connections between the ontological artifice of the digital and the inherent realism of Mann's subject matter, a convergence that results in a style that approaches hyperrealism. In the case of *Public Enemies*, the film's digital production is reflected in both its style and its narrative, with a central emphasis on the immediate experience of history. Not only does this signify a reinvigoration of historical aspects of the gangster film, but it also demonstrates a deliberate deviation from generic visual style to create a level of heightened realism.

Visual style and the period aesthetic

The stylised period aesthetic of *Public Enemies* is best shown in scenes of action that grant a sense of subjectivity to the experience of events. These characteristics extend to other more static or restrained scenes, but the film's combat sequences most clearly express these elements, such as in the scenes of bank robbery, escape (the flight from Little Bohemia), and the climactic shooting of Dillinger outside the Biograph

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representations of the past that engage with these processes of remediation, given the accelerated transition to digital practices and styles.

[446] Rybin, *The Cinema of Michael Mann*, p. 190.

Theater. The stylistic presentation of these scenes align closely with David Bordwell's theory of "intensified continuity", a now familiar concept that argues that while cinema's visual style generally adheres to the principles of classical filmmaking in terms of representing space, time, and narrative relations, a new style has emerged that amounts to an intensification of established visual and editing techniques. For Bordwell, "Intensified continuity is traditional continuity amped up, raised to a higher pitch of emphasis. It is the dominant style of American mass-audience films today."[447] This style is encapsulated by four significant changes in camerawork and editing: closer framing (especially during scenes of dialogue), bipolar extremes of lens lengths, a free-ranging camera, and faster cutting.

Bordwell argues that "most films are cut more rapidly than at any other time in U.S. studio filmmaking,"[448] and questions whether this has led to a post-classical breakdown of spatial continuity. Between 1930 and 1960, most Hollywood feature films, of whatever length, contained between 300 and 700 shots giving an average shot length (ASL) of between eight and eleven seconds. *Public Enemies* has an ASL of 3.55 seconds, with approximately 2180 shots in the film. While this figure seems high, the film is not as rapidly edited as *Armageddon* (1998) or *Any Given Sunday* (1999), films that Bordwell identifies as being 3000-4000 shot movies. It can be argued that the digital—in terms of both filmmaking practices and aesthetic constructions—further amplifies the features that Bordwell identifies. Bordwell notes that some action sequences are cut so fast as to make the action itself incomprehensible yet retain a spatial coherence; for instance, he opines that, "For the sake of intensifying the

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[447] David Bordwell, 'Intensified Continuity' in *Film Quarterly* 55: 3 (Spring 2002), p. 16.
[448] Ibid., p. 17

dialogue exchange, filmmakers have omitted some of the redundancies provided by establishing shots."[449] On the whole, there has been a push towards a more elliptical style that has reduced the number of establishing shots and two-shots, instead favouring variations of the shot/reverse shot, and this editing style is similarly evident in *Public Enemies*, exacerbated by the roving, frenetic quality of the film's visual style.

Digital cinematography has also altered the use of variable lens lengths for different shots: long-focus lenses can be used for close-ups, medium shots and establishing shots, resulting from the potentiality for greater depth of field. The mobility of the digital camera further allows for a certain non-uniform approach to framing. *Public Enemies* has an emphasis on very tight framing, something Mann previously exhibited in *Ali* (2001), *Collateral*, and *Miami Vice*. There is a sense of both intimacy and claustrophobia involved in seeing the closeness of an actor's face, and these extreme close-ups seem to underline Bordwell's point that, "In the studio years, a filmmaker would rely on the actor's whole body, but now actors are principally faces."[450] Bordwell raises the issue of close framing, particularly in dialogue scenes wherein filmmakers must find new ways of emphasising particular lines or facial reactions, a feature that also relates to the pacing of a scene.

Caldwell describes the hyperactive camera and editing styles synonymous with intensified continuity as having a "hit-and-run feel," a kinetic and present quality that works against the staged or rehearsed sense of more formal film/TV productions.[451] The stylistic result of this approach is a quasi-documentary aesthetic, shooting quickly

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[449] Ibid.

[450] Ibid., p. 20

[451] Caldwell, *Production Culture*, p. 174.

and proximate to the actors. However, with film productions the emphasis on coverage is even higher,[452] thereby avoiding some of the editing dilemmas of documentaries such as breaks in spatial continuity and screen direction. *Public Enemies* demonstrates several of these post-continuity stylistic tendencies, though often the presentation of scenes does not so much violate continuity as fragment it. Mann draws attention to the technical extravagance of shooting a period film on digital, indulging in the "overt narration" and "flamboyant displays of technique" that Bordwell claims is typical of contemporary Hollywood style.[453] *Public Enemies* is particularly fond of the "push-in" whereby the camera tracks up to the actor's face, a movement that often underscores a moment of realisation but also builds continuous tension, especially when coupled with a shot/reverse shot passage. This has the effect of insisting on the image, and is significant in that what was once reserved for moments of particular significance or purpose can now belong to a heightened normalcy, merely part of the assembled tapestry of a scene that may be legible, illegible, or both. As Bordwell says, "even ordinary scenes are heightened to compel attention and sharpen emotional resonance."[454] This amplification of the ordinary commands greater attention and suggests further insight into the characters' experiences, and is combined with the inherent hyperrealism of digital cinematography. For instance, during the sequence in which Dillinger leaves the Biograph and is tailed by Purvis and his agents, the use of slow-motion in combination with the push-in conveys the burden of his movements and, in a manner, the weight of

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[452] This idea of coverage is studied in relation to the filming and editing strategy of *The New World* in Chapter One.

[453] Bordwell, 'Intensified Continuity', p. 25. Regarding the free moving camera, Bordwell cites the development of movements from the prolonged following shot, developed in the 1920s and becoming prominent in 1930s in films such as *Scarface*, and the crane shot, which "now serves as casual embellishment" rather than marking a dramatic highpoint (ibid., p. 20).

[454] Ibid., p. 24.

his whole mythology, presenting both the magisterial inevitability of Dillinger's death and his growing awareness of the violent confrontation that awaits him. While audiences have become accustomed to the use of features of intensified continuity to convey recent events (as in *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Captain Phillips* [2013], for example), this is problematised when dealing with events further in the past. In this instance, the disjuncture between form and content leads us to question the historical intentions for which the filmmakers were striving, namely the immediacy and experiencing of historical events.

Bordwell is critical of Mann's approach to the genre, believing that Mann is more of a stylist than a realist.[455] Of the film's aesthetic and technology, he says:

> The digital version too often teemed with artifacts, blown-out bright areas, and disconcerting shifts in tonal values within scenes […] The chance to take high-definition video all the way, especially in low-light situations, seems to have invigorated Mann creatively, but it may have distracted him from basic craft.[456]

While citing the film's staccato cutting and jittery camera, he also points out how the film's narrative could be described as clumsily inconsistent, daringly elliptical, or calculatedly ambiguous. While Bordwell sees *Public Enemies*—and Mann's oeuvre

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[455] See David Bordwell, '(50) Days of summer (movies), Part 2', *Observations on Film Art* [Online], 12 September 2009. Available at: http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2009/09/12/50-days-of-summer-movies-part-2/, accessed 29/10/13. Regarding the critical view of Mann as a "realist", F.X. Feeney says: "Certainly, whether the subject is thievery, frontier life, the nuanced struggle between the news media and corporate money, or that of a celebrated athlete to find his life's meaning in a world of bigotry, Mann seeks authenticity above all" (Feeney, *Michael Mann*, p. 11). Feeney describes him as a "synthesist", in contrast to his status as a "stylist", in that he "immerses himself thoroughly in his subject, taking pains, testing, judging, throwing away whatever rings false, breaking the truth of a given topic down to its working parts" (ibid.). This is something that digital video allows him to achieve by presenting his findings with a sense of both immediacy and detachment. Although he is looking to create (or discover) and present the viewer with as little mediation as possible, these images are always going to be mediated through the camera and therefore his choice of technology must have some impact in this regard.

[456] Bordwell, '(50) Days of summer (movies), Part 2'.

more generally—as largely updating cinematic classicism, others consider it as a daring leap beyond it.

Scenes of action in the film demonstrate a series of techniques used to create the layered, immediate experience. By way of example, the start of the second major heist sequence, perpetrated by Dillinger and Baby Face Nelson (Stephen Graham) at Sioux Falls, South Dakota, is signalled by the shooting of a police officer with no prior establishing shot to provide any additional locational or temporal information (Figure 2.8). There follows a series of very quick cuts, the first two of which are reaction shots of Homer Van Meter, in both close-up (Figure 2.9) and extreme close-up (Figure 2.10), giving the impression of a double take, a moment of surprise and alarm. These shots last for less than a second, symptomatic of Mann's approach to scenes of this nature, imparting a chaotic, fragmented observational presentness to the action. The scene then cuts to the interior of the bank where the robbery is already taking place. Nelson, who shot the police officer outside, stands proudly on the telling desk and laughs, "I got one!" (Figure 2.11). This is the closest example of an interior establishing shot of the bank, a low shot that emphasises the period architecture and décor. As the bandits and their hostages file out of the bank, there are a series of eye-level, handheld shots that draw attention to our presence within the group, giving the impression that we are jostling amongst the throng of robbers, tellers and customers (Figure 2.12). This is complemented by reverse shots that focus on the faces of the criminals (Figure 2.13), isolating their presence but also emphasising their awareness and registering of the actions around them, with focus shifts revealing further detail in the eyes and facial expressions. In spatial terms, while the bandit group is framed to

emphasise proximity and integration, the antagonistic side of the scene is shot to accentuate distance. When Dillinger exits the bank, the sequence of him firing his Tommy gun at a building across the street consists of a series of proximal, almost first-person point-of-view shots (Figure 2.14) that is complemented by the deep staging of the reverse shot (Figure 2.15) as he is fired upon by the police.

This scene demonstrates, through the lack of establishing shots and the positioning and movement of the handheld camera, the effect of locating the audience *within* this experience in terms of conveying the experiences of the bank robbers. This style, with its emphasis on point of view, frantic motion, and focus on specific details, seems closely associated with the probing camera and *cinéma vérité* look of documentary. However, this is somewhat counteracted by the rapid editing and short average shot length that are characteristic of mainstream cinematic technique. The handheld, proximal approach to the faces of the actors, shot with long lenses from a few feet away, together with a collective subjectivity, provides a real-time immediacy and a sense of witnessing the events taking place.

This combined sense of confusion and observation seems to support Mann's desire to "locate an audience immediately within the frame of his existence and to experience some of that rush of… where's this going? What're you doing? You're not going to live forever,"[457] that gives Dillinger an intense trajectory throughout the course of the film. Furthermore, Mann talks about locating an audience within this experience in the most detailed manner possible:

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[457] Michael Mann quote in Patterson, 'Number one with a bullet'.

> I look for where or how to bring the audience into the moment, to reveal what somebody's thinking and what they're feeling, and where it feels like you're inside the experience. Not looking at it, with an actor performing it, but have an actor live it, and you as audience, if I could bring the audience inside to experience.[458]

Whether this proximity works to bring the audience into the moment, to get inside the experience, is entirely subjective, but both Mann and Spinotti repeatedly claim that these are the intended effects of making the film in this way. There is a polarising difference of opinion between those who find this form of digital distracting and alienating, and those who see the film as achieving the desired sense of immersion in realising the era with greater clarity.[459] The digital aesthetic may compromise the illusion of period reality in its incongruity, yet this technology is also able to elucidate the flaws, interruptions and inaccuracies of human perception.[460] If we are to accept that any representation of the past—visual or otherwise—is inevitably inconsistent, subjective and disputable, then the stylistic possibilities that derive from digital filmmaking can be seen to depict the present experience of the past in a manner that

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[458] Mann quoted in Steve Prokopy, 'Michael Mann chats with Capone about crime, punishment and Public Enemies', *Ain't It Cool News* [Online], 29 June 2009. Available at: http://www.aintitcool.com/node/41556, accessed 29/10/13.

[459] For instance, while David Denby writes that the film's "high-definition digital images are crisply focussed" (David Denby, 'Tommy Guns and Toys', *The New Yorker* [Online], 06 July 2009. Available at: http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/cinema/2009/07/06/090706crci_cinema_denby, accessed 29/10/13.), Ty Burr states that "the director's decision to shoot on high-definition video has become a liability by this point, with lights in the night-time sequences overmodulating and bleeding onto the film like cheap camcorder shots" (Ty Burr, 'Public Enemies', *The Boston Globe* [Online], 01 July 2009. Available at:
http://www.boston.com/ae/movies/articles/2009/07/01/8216public_enemies8217_has_powerful_stars_problematic_script/, accessed 29/10/13.). Other critics are more undecided: Todd McCarthy, for example, opines that its style "justifies the time and attention to detail involved in creating it"; but he also acknowledges that HD has both advantages and disadvantages, stating that "the detail and depth of field are phenomenal in the dark scenes, but the bright flaring, occasional unnatural movements and excessive detailing of skin flaws remain annoying, as does the insubstantiality of the images compared to those created on film" (Todd McCarthy, 'Review: "Public Enemies"', *Variety* [Online], 24 June 2009. Available at: http://variety.com/2009/film/reviews/public-enemies-1200474972/, accessed 29/10/13.).

[460] Nicholas Rombes refers to the accidental and deliberate imperfections inherent in new digital filmmaking forms as forming what he calls "DV humanism," a warm aesthetic that contradicts the "cold logic of the code" or the "deep distrust of the everyday world" (Rombes, *Cinema in the Digital Age*, p. 28).

communicates its imperfections through a more stringent eye. Steven Rybin describes Mann's work as Vertovian, referring to a strand in Dziga Vertov's work that argues that the camera is "superhuman", functioning as an eye which sees more than any single human being can envision. He states: "his images compose more, suggest more, than his characters—always deeply engaged with their own actions, obsessions, and desires—fully realize or understand."[461] The digital aesthetic of the film not only has a historical purpose but also an expressive one, in connecting the audience with the characters, their ideologies, thoughts, and actions.

Lisa Purse argues that by harnessing a range of aesthetic strategies that evoke our physical experience of existence, films are able to bring the human body emphatically into focus and produce different forms of 'commentary'. Using the example of the opening of *United 93* (2006), Purse notes that "incursions into the frame persistently remind the spectator of their own embodied 'presence' in relation to these figures [of the hijackers]."[462] By blocking parts of the scene with intervening objects and placing them close to the camera lens so as to put them out-of-focus, the film "foregrounds physical proximity-as-experience for the spectator."[463] For Purse, this subsequently gives the impression of both the camera being 'really there' to record these images, and also that the spectator is situated within this space, proximal to the bodies being viewed. The spectator is thus constructed as a 'presence' in the diegetic space, "a body watching other bodies that appear *close enough to touch*."[464] In this instance,

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[461] Rybin, *The Cinema of Michael Mann*, p. 192.
[462] Lisa Purse, 'Working through the body: Textual-Corporeal Strategies in *United 93*', in Tom Brown and James Walters (eds.), *Film Moments: Criticism, History, Theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 159.
[463] Ibid.
[464] Ibid, p. 160.

the investment of corporeality—through such attention to the intimate physicality and proximity of the hijackers—creates a phenomenological experience in which the embodied is politicised due to the radical breakdown of traditional, rationalist ways of seeing. As Laura U. Marks says regarding the haptic quality of images,[465] they "invite the viewer to dissolve his or her subjectivity in the close and bodily contact with the image […] In the dynamic movement between optical and haptic ways of seeing, it is possible to compare different ways of knowing and interacting with an other."[466] Haptic imagery can thus challenge the spectator's relationship to the physical presence of on-screen figures. Concurrently, this combination of proximity and focus to heighten awareness of sensory perception can also reflect the camera's—and therefore our own—inability to achieve true objectivity in terms of how we read a scene or a situation.

In *Public Enemies* the gangster figure is placed in the immediate past-as-present as opposed to the densely actualised near-present of the classical gangster film or the dead, empty past of the revisionist biographical gangster cycle. Thomas Allen Nelson writes in his study of Stanley Kubrick that "[f]ilm cannot avoid the aesthetic consequences of the impersonal, concrete nature of reality—its photographic *thereness*—nor can it deny the presence of the human signifier."[467] Steven Rybin sees similarities in Mann's ability to capture portions of realties in his exploration of contingency, allowing "for a multitude of cinematographic compositional possibilities, while at the same time evoking an unwieldy, relativistic world in which the very same

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[465] Marks uses the word 'haptic' to describe perception involving all the sense rather than simply touch.
[466] Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), pp. 13, 18.
[467] Thomas Allen Nelson, *Kubrick: Inside a Film Artist's Maze* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), pp. 15-16.

possibilities may be undone by the slightest unforeseen interference."[468] In *Public Enemies*, the characters function as human signifiers that create personal meaning, tied to a history where we are made more alert to the "impersonal, concrete nature of reality" because of our awareness of the finality of human agency involved.

The film's emphasis on immediacy is further reflected in the lack of character development over the course of the diegesis. Unlike Mann's earlier work in which identity is clearly established and subsequently challenged, such as the key thematic conflict between professional thief Neil McCauley (Robert De Niro) and homicide detective Vincent Hanna (Al Pacino) in *Heat* (1995), the world of *Public Enemies* is one of constant motion that grants neither the time nor the space for personal identities to be developed. The perpetual withdrawal back into the volatile criminal world of hyper-awareness is represented through the fabricated (often pseudonymous) identities that are imposed on the characters by their profession. This inauthenticity of identity is both successful and alienating, evidenced in Dillinger's visit to the offices of the Chicago Police Department's "Dillinger Squad" where he impudently surveys the collated materials on his associates. Confronted with the knowledge that all of his allies have either been killed or captured, he insouciantly asks the officers present what the baseball score is, yet they fail to recognise him. There is an arrogance, swagger and calm self-confidence with which Dillinger walks the streets of Chicago. He revels in flaunting himself in front of those who are actively hunting him down, truly valuing his celebrity status as both a lawbreaker and a man of the people. Verbal exchanges in the film are as terse and mechanical as the scenes of bank robbery, with

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[468] Rybin, *The Cinema of Michael Mann*, p. 114.

the dialogue being predominantly expository and supporting the immediate nature of the narrative in terms of eschewing traditional forms of character development. This method of narrative engagement through diegetic distancing is reflected in Dillinger's own experience of viewing *Manhattan Melodrama* (1934) at the Biograph shortly before his death at the close of the film.

Mann appears to be fascinated by a particular type of character—recurrently, but not exclusively, criminals—who live by impulse and retain an essential focus on the present. Individuals such as Frank (James Caan) in *Thief* (1981), McCauley in *Heat*, and Sonny Crockett (Colin Farrell) in *Miami Vice* each live according to the same maxim of "time is luck." Discussing his own future with gang leader Alvin Karpis (Giovanni Ribisi) in a Chicago ballroom after the film's opening bank robbery, Dillinger resists contemplating what lies ahead: "We're having too good a time today. We ain't thinking about tomorrow." Dillinger is perpetually rooted in the present, and though we see little of his preparation, we are witness to how he conducts perfect bank heists and makes clean getaways, while also crafting a public persona as a "man of the people." His constant evasion of stasis marks him out as an individual who is moving away from the past—one that remains largely abstruse and ambivalent within the film's narrative—rather than towards the future. Indeed, in the few moments of rest, leisure or relaxation in the film, Dillinger's world is interrupted or assaulted: he is captured in his hotel in Tucson, Arizona, ambushed at Little Bohemia, and killed when visiting the Biograph Theater in Chicago.

It is soon after stating his desire for immediate pleasures that Dillinger meets Frechette, and after a brief courtship he is eager to label her as "his girl," evidence of a level of instant fulfilment that parallels his criminal success. He demonstrates an unreserved candour about his condition; when Frechette asks him during their first date what he wants (from life) he replies pithily, "Everything. Right now," causing Billie to exclaim, "Boy, you're in a hurry." The instigation of this romance concurrently supports and challenges this notion of immediacy as the incessant forward motion of Dillinger is almost temporarily disrupted by her presence, breaking the deterministic flux and forcing him to reassess where he stands in both public and private spheres. But this also seems to be an expression of fantasy, and Dillinger's reassurance that they are not in danger—"I ain't going anywhere, and neither are you. I'm going to die an old man in your arms," he tells her during a stay in Florida—is hard to read as anything other than (self-)delusion and performance, given that the manner of his early death is one of the most familiar aspects of his mythology.

Film technologies and historical re-enactment

David Eldridge connects the film industry's turn to technology in the 1950s (in response to its economic crisis) to the history film, with the genre chosen to showcase the innovations of 3D and other formats. The development and introduction of a range of film processes, screen sizes, camera lenses and sound systems were all employed to introduce a new level of spectacle to the cinema that would encourage audience attendances. Eldridge states, "All of these technological advancements and gimmicks, so characteristic of 1950s cinema, were launched with one foot firmly in the

past – heralded by history films,"[469] citing such examples as *The Robe* (CinemaScope; 1953), *Around the World in 80 Days* (Todd-AO; 1956) and *The Ten Commandments* (VistaVision; 1956). As John Belton suggests, these widescreen processes demonstrated more than just the dimensions of the screen: they "introduced a level of visual spectacle that often threatened to overwhelm the narrative."[470] Eldridge further sees these new technologies as "expand[ing] the filmmaker's conception of history as an extravagant pageant."[471]

The adoption and advancement of these technological innovations in the historical cinema of the 1950s is comparable to the impact of new digital technologies on modern history films. Unlike the period of technological progression that Eldridge identifies, modern history films have not been "selected" to showcase the capabilities and scope of the technology, but they do represent a significant engagement with this technology in terms of its impact on the aesthetic and narrative concerns of historical cinema. For instance, Michael Mann's insistence that the use of digital video on *Public Enemies* creates a more realistic and immersive aesthetic is redolent of the affinity between 3D and history established in 1950s cinema. While the rhetoric used to promote 3D and widescreen history films of this period sold spectacle as a participatory event, Eldridge notes the change in promotional language to "witnessing" the past rather than active participation. William Paul further states that the notion of participation only makes sense "if we could give 'participate' more of a passive meaning" where the audience "give themselves up to the image that has taken over

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[469] Eldridge, *Hollywood's History Films*, p. 57.
[470] John Belton, *Widescreen Cinema* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 194.
[471] Eldridge, *Hollywood's History Films*, p. 59.

our field of vision."[472] Similarly, Mann's emphasis on narrative immediacy may induce a passive response in the "witnessing" of the past rather than "participating" in it: the "liveness" of this imagery removes a conscious framework for structuring the action and engages with a modernist documentary style, albeit one amplified and kineticised to the point of hyperrealism. Eldridge also notes how the "realistic" experience of 1950s historic spectacle was undermined by poor 3D effects and the necessity of wearing anaglyph glasses, and the digital aesthetic of *Public Enemies* also proved distracting in its jarring (sometimes blurred) motion and disjunctive style. This compromises the realistic depiction of events by foregrounding the artifice of historical construction, despite a *vérité* styling that attempts to communicate the "liveness" of events by documenting them in such a manner as to express the "experiencing" of the past.[473]

Period films necessarily present challenges of authenticity, but we must consider whether telling a period narrative by means of modern, digital media is any more anachronistic than its telling through the medium of film. As Jonathan Walker points out, "Most complaints on the issue of anachronism concern questions of content or

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[472] William Paul, 'The Aesthetics of Emergence', *Film History* 5:3 (1993), p. 336.

[473] *Public Enemies* can be compared to Steven Shaviro's analysis of *Gamer* (2009), a sci-fi thriller about progressive technologies, the social spectacle of "gamespace," and the hyperbolising of the contemporary media landscape. Although the former is set in the past, unlike *Gamer*'s focus on futurity, they are both marked by an affective emphasis on hypermediation and immediacy, with time compressed and foreshortened to convey what is occurring in the present diegetic moment. Yet both films also acknowledge that this immersiveness is not altogether seamless because "'this exact moment' is never entirely self-contained" (Shaviro, *Post Cinematic Affect*, p. 115). As Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari stated, systems of control "work only when they break down, and by continually breaking down" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983], p. 8). While I would not go so far as to say that digitally-produced films such as *Public Enemies* and *Che* are post-cinematic, they do foreground the continual remediation of older media; but *The Social Network* also proves that this process can work the other way around, incorporating themes of technology and social change into such a traditional genre as the biopic.

mentality" regarding modern impositions on historical characters and events.[474] For Walker, the deliberate use or acknowledgement of formal anachronism is a central feature of what he defines as "textual realism", a form of intertextuality that creates a tension between modern storytelling techniques and strategies of the past.[475] The emphasis on the visual in these experiential accounts serves to highlight what is missing in written accounts, while signifying its own value as a form of historical discourse. This opposition emphasises the distance between lived experience and representation, and in the case of *Public Enemies* this operates to the detriment of its immediate narrative.

Walker's conception of re-enactment involves violating the integrity of the past by exposing its relativity, reassembling the fragments of the past to form new narratives. This process, in refusing to suppress the anachronistic elements that increasingly arise from formal strategies of digital editing and filming techniques, emphasises the distance between past and present. Moreover, it represents alternate modes of approaching the past in order to engage with new critical meanings and levels of historical discourse. As argued previously, the digital imagery of *Public Enemies* is atypical in terms of both the gangster genre and the historical film more generally, as the film's stylistic attributes present a new range of iconography that is lacking in retrospective or nostalgic intent. Moreover, the reworking of the aesthetic conventions of the gangster picture through digital filmmaking practices further extend features of "intensified continuity" to the historical film.

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[474] Jonathan Walker, 'Textual Realism and Reenactment' in Iain McCalman and Paul A. Pickering (eds.), *Historical Reenactment: From Realism to the Affective Term* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 91.
[475] This is a strategy that redefines realism by re-enacting the way the past represented itself, in contrast with the "blank parody" of pastiche that pretends this tension does not exist.

Stella Bruzzi puts forth a more progressive and multifaceted view concerning modern forms of historical re-enactment. Focusing on the convergence of historical events and changes in media production, she notes the dynamic relationship between information and its re-use in fictional contexts: "What we are witnessing is an excitable flirtation with how to show and perform facts and evidence, with mixing genres and switching cultural arenas."[476] This is a collective effect Bruzzi explores through the concept of "approximation," in terms of how texts approximate reality (and therefore history) rather than merely representing it. These "approximations" are re-enactments of evidence and fact "propelled by a *frisson* of recognition," of knowing a film's point of reference while also recognising that it is not the equivalent of its reconstruction: "It is into this gap that we insert our desires, convictions and opinions."[477] In *Public Enemies*, re-enactment is used to push beyond realist discourse into hyperrealism, amplifying the experience of the past while acknowledging its fabrication. This emphasis on liveness and the experiencing of historical events is distinct from the form of historical re-enactment displayed in *The New World*, perhaps better elucidating Jerome de Groot's claim that "[h]istory somehow has to 'live' while acknowledging its very 'pastness'."[478] In the pre-production phase of *Public Enemies*, Mann states:

> The challenge was trying to make 1933 come alive. And be alive just the way it's alive for you right now in 2009. And that meant not just how things looked, but how people thought. How men courted women in 1933. How ex-convicts thought about life and their fate in 1933. What the material

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[476] Stella Bruzzi, 'Memory, Re-enactment and Equivalent Events'. Conference paper delivered at NECS conference, 'Time Networks: Screen Media and Memory', Lisbon, 21-23 June 2012.

[477] Ibid. Bruzzi is looking more specifically at the collage of drama and documentary (including the insertion and integration of archival footage into a dramatic diegesis), using examples such as *The Baader-Meinhof Complex* and *Buongiorno, notte* (2003), but these observations are also relevant when considering the employment of handheld digital aesthetics

[478] de Groot, *Consuming History*, p. 113.

world meant to those who were hungry and denied. The desperation on the streets.[479]

The filmmakers decided to establish the story's period primarily through the use of actual locations, including Little Bohemia Lodge in Wisconsin, the scene of a gunfight between Dillinger's gang and the FBI, the Lake County Jail in Crown Point, Indiana, where Dillinger staged an audacious escape, and the Biograph Theater in Chicago. One of the main goals of location shooting is to reliably reproduce locales as natural environments, using props, décor, and period vehicles to replicate the historical milieu according to parameters of indexical realism or perceived notions of history.[480] Spinotti states, "Very few things suggest an atmosphere better than a real location; the way things are painted, the relationship between interior and exterior, and all of the other physical details tend to establish visual truth in a very tangible way. Shooting digitally, you see locations in a different way."[481] There is an association here between the use of real-life locations and Mann's decision to shoot digitally, with the increased detail and clarity giving greater force to the historical potential of the space. While Mann claims not to have "a slavish adherence to actuality,"[482] the design of these scenes epitomises his affinity for period accuracy.

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[479] Michael Mann quoted in Emanuel Levy, 'Public Enemies: Interview with Director Michael Mann', EmanuelLevy.com [Online] 01 July 2009. Available at: http://www.emanuellevy.com/interview/public-enemies-interview-with-director-michael-mann-5/, accessed 29/10/13.

[480] This makes an interesting contrast with the reconstruction of 1970s San Francisco in David Fincher's Zodiac which created all-digital environments using photogrammetric methods, achieving a degree of perceptual realism that would not have been created without digital effects. In this instance, the same rules and preconceptions regarding period realism and historical re-enactment apply, but the filmmakers are working on a digital backlot rather than an actual location. See Stephen Prince on digital environment creation, Digital Visual Effects in Cinema, pp. 170-176.

[481] Dante Spinotti quoted in Holben, 'Big Guns'.

[482] See Rob Carnevale, 'Public Enemies – Michael Mann interview', Indie London [Online], 2009. Available at: http://www.indielondon.co.uk/Film-Review/public-enemies-michael-mann-interview, accessed 29/10/13.

These issues of historical re-enactment are most heightened at the Biograph, where North Lincoln Avenue in Chicago was entirely redressed to appear as it did on the night that Dillinger was killed (Figures 2.16 and 2.17). This transformation was necessary given the gentrification of the area and other changes since the 1930s, and the mythological nature of Dillinger's death makes the Biograph a site of particular historical and symbolic importance. Production designer Nathan Crowley described the finished street as "an amalgamation of research and design," re-creating the neighbourhood with cobblestones, 1930s storefronts, automobiles and streetcars. Mann states:

> We engineered it so that we were able to stage exactly where Dillinger was when he died—the same square foot of pavement that he died on—so that when Johnny [Depp] looked up he saw the last thing Dillinger saw. That means a lot to an actor and to a director… to find yourself in those environments where you can suspend your disbelief and give yourself the magic of the moment.[483]

Mann was also able to provide Depp with the actual clothing and personal articles of Dillinger. By shooting digitally, they were able to work with the existing lighting to maintain a level of realism that would help to achieve the effect of immediacy, and the emphasis on location shooting—in addition to period wardrobe, vehicles and props—support this re-enacting approach. *Public Enemies*, in re-creating the world and events of 1933-34 and presenting the subjective experience of events, attempts to create, in R.G. Collingwood's words, the "immediate experience" wherein the agent is not reflective about that experience but perceives it instantaneously as the spectator does.

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[483] Quoted in Levy, '*Public Enemies*: Interview with Director Michael Mann'. For more on the extent of the film's historical re-creation, see Bryan Burrough's account of his role in the film's production in which he was an extra, "portraying one of the first reporters to rush toward Dillinger's fallen body." See Bryan Burrough, 'Johnny Depp plays John Dillinger as public enemy No 1 returns', *The Times* [Online], 13 June 2009. Available at: http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/arts/film/article2431650.ece, accessed 29/10/13.

Iconography and identity

The film's scenes of historical re-enactment are in keeping with its overarching iconography that is representative of specific events of the period, such as the scene following Dillinger's capture in which he poses with prosecutor Robert Estill (Alan Wilder) (Figure 2.18 and 2.19), the utilisation of newsreel-style footage during Dillinger's arrival at Wittman Regional Airport (Figure 2.20), and his on-screen presence at the picture house (Figure 2.21).[484]

There is, however, a historical disparity that the film does not address, being that for all its attempts to present the period in its entirety, neither the narrative nor the mise-en-scène deals directly with the Great Depression. Aside from the introductory titles[485]—which appear to provide factual information but instead act as an acknowledgement of ignorance on the part of the audience regarding this period of history—and a single shot of a homeless man who can be seen as Dillinger makes his escape from Crown Point jail, the film is reluctant to engage with any specific social or economic issues of the Depression (or their consequences), instead depicting only the world of excess that Dillinger and his associates inhabit. The spectator is positioned within a very different world than those realised in other 1930s-set gangster pictures, one that is populated by historical figures who live in the moment and act with little or no regard for the future, being aware that the end is moving ever closer. *Public Enemies*' emphasis on narrative immediacy sets it up in contrast to the lack of foresight

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[484] These moments also chime with Bruzzi's notion of stimulating a "frisson of recognition" in the viewer regarding past events and forms of representation.

[485] "It is the fourth year of the Great Depression. For John Dillinger, Alvin Karpis and Baby Face Nelson it is the golden age of bank robbery…"

often demonstrated by characters in historical films,[486] thereby undermining the audience's privileged position of being informed by hindsight and diminishing the poignancy of the inevitable outcome.

Mann provides the characters with the suitable socio-economic justifications and motivations for their crimes, but we are not presented with hardship. Instead, he is more interested in other forms of historical specificity, namely the technological. This is present on both sides of the law, with the FBI's new methods of criminal detection and prevention (phone wiretaps, forensics, and other scientific approaches) reflected in the advancements in syndicated crime, with the numbers rackets and various gambling activities seen as a threat to the bandit's way of life.[487] Furthermore, the film is separating the spectator from its protagonist, not allowing them to become Dillinger in the mode Dennis Bingham identifies as a function of the biopic in which "both artist and spectator to discover what it would be like to be this person, or to be a certain type of person."[488] The film is too deliberately opaque to allow for the spectator to get inside his mind and understand his ideologies. Instead, it seems to be suggesting what it would be like to exist *alongside* Dillinger, with the camera's proximity contributing to a form of vicarious experience, in turn relating to the film's participatory historicism.

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[486] This is a trait that is often apparent before the death of a major historical figure, such as the scene towards the end of *Lincoln* in which the President (Daniel Day-Lewis) is reminded that the First Lady (Sally Field) is waiting for him before their visit to Ford's Theatre, the historic site of his assassination.

[487] The scientific proficiency of the FBI and the integration of technology into their procedures and conduct is reflective of a larger blurring of the paradigm of technology that is synonymous with modernity, and is apt considering this form of technological intelligence is to be the future of criminal investigation procedure.

[488] Dennis Bingham, *Whose Lives Are They Anyway? The Biopic as Contemporary Film Genre* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010), p. 10.

Jean Baudrillard, paraphrasing Walter Benjamin, states that "in the age of [...] mechanical reproducibility, what is lost in the work that is serially reproduced is its *aura*, its singular quality of the here and now."[489] It loses its ritual function and its original presence as we are consumed in the mass consciousness of hyperreality. In *Public Enemies*, however, the period is recreated to such heightened effect that it creates its own aura of the past—of existing within that past—rather than merely reproducing it. Indeed, the climactic death of Dillinger takes place within an environment that is so specific to time and place that it intensifies the past and alludes to the realities of this event. Dillinger attempts to act in resistance to the agents closing in around him, but his doing so simultaneously points to the futility of these efforts. This illustrates the principles and overwhelming power of precession, where models precede the real in the simulacrum, as described by Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulation*.[490] Dillinger faces the isolation that all of Mann's protagonists encounter when they "divorce themselves cognitively from the social simulacrum based on acquisition and oppression."[491] Prior to his shooting, Dillinger sees a version of himself through the character of "Blackie" Gallagher (Clark Gable) in *Manhattan Melodrama* (the film playing at the Biograph), a character based on the created image of Dillinger that was shaped and constructed by the media.

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[489] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation,* trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 99.

[490] Ibid., pp. 16-17.

[491] Mark E. Wildermuth, *Blood in the Moonlight: Michael Mann and Information Age Cinema* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2005), p. 183.

The intertextual relationship between *Manhattan Melodrama* and *Public Enemies* is heightened by the historical context on a narrative and thematic level.[492] The extended use of footage from *Manhattan Melodrama* emphasises its influence on both Dillinger and the film itself, communicating more than simply the idea of being at the cinema, and stressing Dillinger's contemplation of Blackie rather than his absent viewing of the film.[493] This particular scene circularly reinforces the cinematic construction of Self for Dillinger, with his image of identification being that of Gable's gangster who sacrifices his life for his childhood friend Jim Wade (William Powell), now New York's district attorney. In doing so, he confirms Jim's status—and the law's—as the ultimate authority. This also ties him more explicitly to the contemporary conceptualisation of cinematic gangsterdom exemplified by Blackie, and the scene communicates that Dillinger is more lastingly embodied in his fictionalised and fabricated form on the movie screen as Gable's character, making his final stand outside the cinema that much more poignant and significant in the context of Dillinger mythology.

Moreover, the scene interrogates the Bazinian ontology of the cinematic image, finding meaning in the narrative context this duality and taking on a sensuality that derives from the proto-tactile mobility of the image. The intertextuality and circularity of character influence—emphasised by the close-ups on Dillinger's face and eyes and the playing of specific clips and lines of dialogue from *Manhattan Melodrama* that

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[492] Moreover, Dillinger was shot days after the creation of the Production Code Administration, with his death used to promote *Manhattan Melodrama*: "Dillinger Died to See This Picture!" adverts for the film proclaimed. See Thomas Doherty, *Pre-code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930-1934* (Chichester and New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 339.

[493] This is in contrast to the use of a clip from *Gold Diggers of 1933* (1933) in *Bonnie and Clyde*, footage that simply contributes to the film's overarching appearance of period authenticity.

emphasise the shared fatality of the two men—accentuate the status of Dillinger as a product (and active member) of a system that sees all things as serial replicas within the simulacrum.   Here, the digital is mobilised to express a moment of self-reflection, emphasised by the importance of the close-up and the immersion it encourages. *Public Enemies* indulges in the concept that the gangster is a fiction of the screen as Dillinger watches Gable playing the role of a false gangster, a melodramatic invention that fed into the Depression-era populace.   There is a sense of the uncanny in this sequence, redolent of the boundaries that Laura Mulvey distinguishes in the representation of reality: "The cinema combines, perhaps more perfectly than any other medium, two human fascinations: one with the boundary between life and death and the other with the mechanical animation of the inanimate, particularly the human, figure."[494]   In this way, the film is a fitting and iconic conflation of filmmaking and law-breaking: Dillinger is identifying with a parallel version of his criminal life on the screen in front of him; Gable's character is influenced by Dillinger's headlines and Dillinger, in turn, feeds off the gangster movies he watches by immersing himself within the moving image.   We are more comfortable watching Dillinger observing the screen than watching the film itself, a strategy the film employs to express the character's inherent fatalism given that, at this point in the film, Billie has been taken away from him and the majority of his personal friends are dead.   Dillinger here is experiencing an awareness of his own demise and his refusal to live outside of his own personal codes: "Die the way you lived.   Don't drag it out," Blackie advises a fellow inmate as he is escorted to his execution.   This is mortality and legend in dialogue.

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[494] Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second*, p. 11.

In *Public Enemies* we are returned to the mythic 1930s, depicted with a realist digital aesthetic as if to provide an immediate sense of both time and place. Not only is the image recognisably digital in the conflicting aspects of clarity (high definition imagery, extreme depth of field) and imperfection (motion-blur, handheld camerawork), but the frame is replete with period-specific props, cars, set design, costumes and make-up.[495] The aesthetic presentation—right down to the colour scheme—and its relation to classical era gangster cinema overwhelms the image. But these references—with the exception of *Manhattan Melodrama*—are largely indirect and are unnecessary for an understanding of the film's characters and narrative. It presents us with the 1930s "as if we were there now," a manner in which we are placed at the centre of the action. The visualisation of the past as the absolute present here is a challenging and destabilising sensation, especially given the typical presentation of the era. *Public Enemies* shows us a past that is purposely superficial, playing with surfaces and the concept of the simulacrum in an attempt to immerse the viewer within the period and position them alongside or proximal to the film's protagonists.

The purpose of narrative immediacy seems to be to blur the distinctions between the present and the near-present, and thus the implications for the period film are hard to ascertain. Filmmakers utilise immediate narration not for compromise or closure but to portray the experiencing of events, and digital has a hyperreal quality that problematises the ability to distinguish reality from its simulation. The immediacy that characterises this type of narrative signifies agency achieved by the protagonists, thus

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[495] Pam Cook notes that the "symbolic carries of period detail – costume, hair, décor – are […] intertextual sign systems with their own logic which constantly threatens to disrupt the concerns of narrative and dialogue." Pam Cook, *Fashioning the Nation: Costume and Identity in British Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1996), p. 67.

portraying authentic-seeming individual actions. In *Public Enemies*, Dillinger's forward-thinking nature and inherent fatalism informs the film's immediacy, but the narrative also contains brief moments of personal reflection, as if to dismiss them in favour of this immediacy. By evoking the immediacy of experience while maintaining a small retrospective element, the film acknowledges the presence of the past while choosing to obfuscate its meaning or relevance. There are far more instances of immediate action than of retrospective reflection in the film, and narrative immediacy plays a key role in portraying the present consciousness of the protagonists and their experiencing of past events. The practice of giving past experiences immediacy through a heightened visual depiction is a form of ascribing meaning and value to these experiences, and the evocation of immediacy is one way of re-visioning and re-vitalising modes of past expression.

Dillinger and gangster revisionism: between myth and history

Over 150 years before the classic gangster cycle made its mark on the screen, Samuel Johnson wrote in his diary on 18 April 1775, "I do not believe any man was ever made a rogue by being present at its representation. At the same time I do not deny that it may have some influence, by making the character of a rogue familiar, and in some degree pleasing."[496] The entry lends support to those who believe that the glamorisation of criminals in the media has an effect on audiences, even at a time when both cinema and the gangster (as we know him to be) were not in existence. The critical discussion of the classic gangster cycle has often seen them "not only as a dominant early variation of the gangster film but as a defining moment which created

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[496] Taken from George Birkbeck Hill (ed.), *Boswell's Life of Johnson, vol. 2* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), p. 239.

the rules, conventions, and iconography of the genre as a whole."[497] These themes and ideologies have been replicated and recycled to form a canon that can be said to comprise a genre or a production cycle of identifiable films. For instance, writers such as Jack Shadoian, Eugene Rosow, and Andrew Bergman have recognised the mirroring and inversion of the American Dream, given the historical basis of Prohibition-era society as a major theme of the genre.

In American mythology the figure of the frontier looms large over collective perceptions, dually ancient and virginal, full of transcendental possibilities in its infiniteness and offering the promise of fulfilment. In turn, this transmits itself into a longing for the past and a peculiar nostalgia for the future with the frontier lingering in American consciousness. In the 20th century we became aware of time as a commodity (something Mann interrogates in several of his films) belonging to hegemonic forces controlled by the flux of capital, giving this era of history new meaning in this context. Advancing technologies allow for far greater cultural expression and involvement in the large social audience of recorded history: radio and cinema (especially talking pictures) provided a grand stage for real life experiences to be transmitted and projected. Myths took on a new potency, with the cinema acting as the locus where history was communicated through folklore and mythology, giving the movies an immediately digested context and meaning.

John Dillinger is of particular significance because of what he communicated to the public at that particular point in history, becoming a Romantic image of freedom in

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[497] Mason, *American Gangster Cinema*, p. 5.

American mythology and consciousness. He was a hero to many of those Americans who were left jobless and hungry by the Great Depression for he was a man who challenged authority, namely the power and autonomy of the banks that caused this economic collapse. In assaulting the banks he became a populist hero, free from the constraints of the ubiquitous societal forces that ensured people remained poor and immobile (both socially and geographically): Dillinger proved that the system could be beaten. Being a part of the public community, Dillinger, Floyd, Karpis et al. were aware of and bore witness to their own "becoming" as myths, and they were further able to influence and manipulate their public image and perception as well as influencing and collaborating with each other. Notoriously, Clyde Barrow told a bank customer to put his money away as he was there "for the bank's money," a line that he had appropriated from reading the printed stories about Dillinger's criminal exploits.[498] With his public persona in mind, Dillinger's bank robberies become performances where he would demonstrate his trademarks such as offering his coat to a female hostage or leaping over the bank teller's desk:[499] Claire Bond Potter comments that "Witnesses remarked on the young bandit's cheerful manner, his snappy clothes, his good looks, and his graceful vault over a teller's gate."[500] While this sense of performance appeared to soften Dillinger's edges and make him a more appealing character to the public, his lethalness with a weapon and his ability to think and act quickly allowed him to maintain his reputation for dangerousness and unpredictability.

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[498] Incidentally, a scene of the nature features in both *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Public Enemies*.

[499] Mann shows us both of these sequences but they take on further significance due to the film's style. Incidentally, the act of vaulting the desk is something Dillinger picked up from watching Douglas Fairbanks in the *The Mark of Zorro* (1920).

[500] Claire Bond Potter, *War on Crime: Bandits, G-Men, and the Politics of Mass Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998), p. 142.

Clifford Geertz suggests that, "No matter how peripheral, ephemeral or free-floating the charismatic figure we may be concerned with—the wildest prophet, the most deviant revolutionary—we must begin with the center and the symbols and conceptions that prevail there if we are to understand him and what he means."[501] Unlike Bonnie and Clyde, whose mythology was almost entirely created by Arthur Penn's 1967 film, John Dillinger's mythological past has been an important part of American culture even before it was cemented by his death in 1934. Lawrence Bergreen concisely expresses that "[h]ad John Dillinger never existed, it would have been necessary to invent him, for he acted out a populist fantasy of revenge on the big business interests that had brought the country to its knees."[502] His representation of the rugged individual of the frontier bespeaks a kind of heroic freedom fighter in a world where freedom had ceased to exist; this is reflected in an early scene in *Public Enemies* following Dillinger's escape from the Indiana State Penitentiary in which the camera tracks across Dillinger as he scans the crepuscular horizon, accentuating the vast spatial opportunities before him (Figure 2.22 and 2.23). In opposition to the cruel and impersonal machine that pursues him (embodied by the lawmen) and the corporate institutions that he robbed, Dillinger is a figure with no particular political or ideological goal; rather, he is simply interested in extending his own freedom within transformative spatial borders. He was mythologised as a man that could not be contained by the system, freeing himself from imprisonment with a deftness of touch and intricate planning, who could not be constrained by a structure that guaranteed to "protect and serve"; instead of serving the interests of the individual, the system only operated to protect its own interests. Dillinger's release from a 9-year prison sentence

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[501] Clifford Geertz, 'Centers, Kings, and Charisma: The Symbolics of Power', in Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), p. 143.
[502] Laurence Bergreen, *Capone: The Man and the Era* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), p. 531.

at Indiana State Penitentiary (which he served as a result of getting drunk and robbing a grocery store of $550) can be read in mythological terms as the figure emerging from the belly of the beast.[503]

The release of *Dillinger: Public Enemy No. 1* by Warner Brothers studios in June 1934, a propaganda newsreel commissioned by J. Edgar Hoover that detailed the Division of Investigation's manhunt for Dillinger, signalled his role in popular culture as a newfound celebrity. The short film features clips of Dillinger's capture in Tucson, Arizona and his flight back to Indiana in January 1934 (scenes which are re-created in *Public Enemies*), and was released at a time when the man was still alive and at large. The newsreel is overlaid by a voiceover that points to its origins of production, offering a disingenuous reading of Dillinger's popular status: "A shudder of relief thrilled the country for the entire nation had hoped for the capture of this gunman," a man "who from petty obscurity had leaped to shameful notoriety as public enemy number one within a few brief weeks."[504] Thomas Doherty says of this newsreel: "the tale is so rich in thrills and twists, the anti-hero so audacious and stylish, that a tone of giddy exhilaration cannot be suppressed," with the narrator effusing such proclamations as, "Cars mean nothing to Dillinger – he never pays for them!"[505] The newsreel also features footage of Dillinger's iconic arrival at the jail in Crown Point, Indiana, with images of him framed behind bars and the famous moment where Dillinger rests his arm on the shoulder of prosecutor Robert Estill, grinning broadly for those in attendance (Figure 2.18). As Doherty writes, "He seems untouchable and immortal,

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[503] This relates to Jack Abbott's account of his time in prison, *In the Belly of the Beast* (New York: Random House, 1981), consisting of his letters to Norman Mailer that detailed the brutal and unjust US prison system.

[504] Voiceover taken from Doherty, *Pre-code Hollywood*, p. 142.

[505] Ibid.

already a figure of myth."[506] His public persona was largely created by this impromptu

press conference in January 1934, which introduced Dillinger to millions of Americans.

Mann's film is an exploration of this form of fascination with gangster culture of the

'30s as public perception shifted from adoration to resentment. Dillinger is part of a

dying breed, but at the start of the film he thrives on his public support (hence he does

not advocate kidnapping). The mythology built up by Dillinger during his lifetime was

disseminated extensively following his death; Potter comments, "From the moment his

body hit the ground, Dillinger's death became a working narrative that provided new

opportunities and dilemmas."[507]

As with Jesse James, the death of Dillinger only led to the growth of his myth and the

affirmation of his legendary status, and he remains an icon of that period of American

culture. He continues to be seen as a larger than life character, his laidback, dapper

demeanour reflecting today's gangster cool. Bryan Burrough's book on which the film

is based is a detailed exposé of the FBI's lurching performance over the extended

period of this crime wave as they struggled to combat the gangsters' assured use of

new technologies, namely the automobile and the Tommy gun, but by focusing on the

life of Dillinger the film seems to suffer from a form of narrative compression.[508]

Burrough felt it necessary to defend the film in a piece for the *L.A. Times*:

> Hollywood makes myths and always has, and I guess that's as it should be.
> Moviegoers want to be entertained, after all, so moviemakers have long

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[506] Ibid, p. 143.

[507] Potter, *War on Crime*, p. 161. This is a process that began immediately through the quick thinking of a local businessman who created the death mask of Dillinger and offered a copy to Hoover.

[508] The film's co-producer, Kevin Misher, referred to the book as a "research bible" for the movie he and Mann had in mind. See Mark Harris, 'Dillinger Captured by Dogged Filmmaker!', *New York Times* [Online], 25 June 2009. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/28/movies/28harr.html?_r=0, accessed 29/10/13.

> burnished history to make it more entertaining [...] there is something to be said for trying to give audiences some sense where the lines between history and myth are drawn.[509]

There is a fine line between a film creating references or allusions to other texts, whether they are generic, cinematic, or relating to other forms, and a viewer creating those connections for themselves. It is the aesthetic of *Public Enemies* that separates it from the familiarity of its genre and allows a different narrative of Dillinger's life to be told. It may be too opaque and abstract to work adequately as a biographical film, skipping over the facts and rearranging events to suit this narrative, but, as Burrough claims, it seems to get closer to the sensibilities of this particular man in a specific time and place.[510]

Conflicting discourses: the gangster hero and the couple-on-the-run

The genre's classical cycle served to lay the groundwork for the future developments of the genre by establishing a milieu, an iconography, a particular brand of stardom, and dramatic narratives of tragedy and opposition that involved society and its outcasts. As Munby and Shadoian observe, the classic gangster model seemed to be based on the experiences of the newer members of society, the hyphenated, lower class Americans, whereas real-life gangsters alluded to a different strain of American

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[509] Bryan Burrough, 'Public Enemies' No. 1 (in historical accuracy, writer says)', *Los Angeles Times* [Online], 28 June 2009. Available at: http://articles.latimes.com/2009/jun/28/entertainment/ca-public-enemies28, accessed 29/10/13.

[510] J.R. Jones refers to *The Untouchables* (1987) in his study of *Public Enemies*, finding comparison in the liberties Mann takes with the facts as being reminiscent of the way in which Eliot Ness (Kevin Costner) decides to get tough with Al Capone (Robert De Niro) by policing outside the lines: "Mann has Hoover (Billy Crudup) ordering Purvis to 'take off the white gloves.' Subsequently Purvis's men torture a suspect in his hospital room by applying pressure to a wound and try to beat a confession out of [...] Billie Frechette." The fact that neither incident takes place in the book demonstrates how Mann is manipulating events for his own specific dramatic purpose. J.R. Jones, "History vs. Hollywood," *Chicago Reader* [Online], 02 July 2009. Available at: http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/history-vs-hollywood/Content?oid=1138125, accessed 29/10/13.

outsider.[511]   The historical gangsters covered in Burrough's *Public Enemies*, such as

Dillinger and Bonnie and Clyde who operated in the landscape of the Midwest, have

been subsumed by "a folklore tradition of rebellion (through legends of frontier

banditry, and the American revolutionary soldier campaigning against the oppressions

of colonial British rule)."[512]   Dillinger is pre-eminent as a gangster figure who asserts

himself as an individual rather than as the tragic hero that Robert Warshow famously

describes, a man who illuminates a complex dilemma at the heart of the American

success ethic: failure as a form of death, but success as an isolating triumph that leaves

the figure hated and vulnerable.[513]   With his relationship to the masses, his traversing

of public and private spaces, and his multiple personae, the Dillinger of *Public Enemies*

proves the impossibility of long-term criminal success, conscious as he is of the risks of

this solitary existence.   Unlike Rico (Edward G. Robinson) in *Little Caesar*, a character

who displays no self-control or self-awareness, Dillinger is a refined and self-conscious

protagonist, being introduced as part of a pre-existing crew where the members are

familiar with each other's roles and attributes, and without the necessity for an

initiation that involves formal introductions.[514]   Dillinger is further distinguishable from

the classical gangster figure when contrasted with Tony Camonte (Paul Muni) in

Scarface, a vicious, amoral, and violent gangster of whom Thomas Schatz writes: "his

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[511] See Shadoian on *Little Caesar* (*Dreams and Dead Ends*, pp. 25-42) and Munby on *The Public Enemy* and *Scarface* (*Public Enemies, Public Heroes*, pp. 51-65).

[512] Ibid., p. 79.

[513] Robert Warshow, 'The Gangster as Tragic Hero', *The Immediate Experience: Movies, Comics, Theater & Other Aspects of Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 103. In this seminal work, Warshow identifies a succession of narrative, iconographical, and topographic features that have largely come to define the conception of the classic gangster film. Central in this series is the "rise and fall" narrative of the lonely, tragic, disenfranchised urban male which both parallels and subverts the concept of the American dream.

[514] Rico's arrival causes chaos in a world of organised crime, and the film's rhythmic structure of regular, evenly spaced and articulated scenes creates a tempo that contrasts with Rico's reckless behaviour. We are introduced to the gang through his perspective, and Jack Shadoian says of his character: "His pretensions are continually undercut by irony. *He* thinks he's a big shot; *we* know he isn't" (Shadoian, *Dreams and Dead Ends*, p. 40).

primitive brutality, simple-minded naïveté, and sexual confusion make him a figure with little charisma and virtually no redeeming qualities."[515]   In *Public Enemies*, Dillinger is characterised as consummately self-aware, charismatic and sexually assured, romantic and redeeming codings of the gangster hero that seem to undermine the film's push for realism and veracity.   Dillinger's brutality, however, always serves a purpose, and is applied in various professional and homosocial situations.[516]

Robert Warshow suggested that the gangster could never survive alone, and yet the paradox of the gangster's predicament is the individual eminence that results from success.   It is this achieved individuality that ironically spells the gangster's doom, and he cannot help but be an individual in light of his profession, distinction, and material wealth which function as a prelude to his eventual downfall.   Dillinger emerges as the contradictory anticapitalist gangster, carrying on the tradition of "acting out viewers' […] equivocal desire to avenge themselves on the system that has kept them down,"[517] particularly during this Depression era.   Dillinger's ascent in the capitalist hierarchy forces him to constantly search for that "one last job" with which he can retire to normal life, yet he is also persistently aware of the incongruousness of this concept, a predicament central to the gangster genre.   In *Public Enemies*, Dillinger espouses a belief in meaningful actions, yes, but is also aware that the environment and the social milieu in which he operates will likely cause his downfall.   He exudes a layering of mannered calmness in his assertion of agency (referring again to the scene in which he

[515] Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Film Making, and the Studio System* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981, p. 91.

[516] This is an aspect that interestingly correlates to Warren Beatty's depiction of Clyde Barrow in *Bonnie and Clyde*, as discussed later in this chapter.

[517] Thomas Leitch, *Crime Films* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 111.

visits the offices of the "Dillinger Squad"), but his fears of the tenuous nature of what lies ahead—his life in a constant state of flux—becomes progressively importunate. While the character recalls the classical gangster figure in his elegant professional attire (the source of his coat, for instance, becomes a significant plot point of FBI operations), his composed manner is contrary to what we see in Rico and Tony Camonte.

The work that Dillinger and his gang carry out in the film is never moralised, nor are the extreme actions taken by Purvis and his nascent forces in their attempts to extinguish the flames of this crime wave; Dillinger's brutality is understandable given his circumstances, and we are not forced to question our identification with him as we are with Purvis. His violence is a reaction to antagonistic forces around him, conflict for which he is prepared but is not premeditated. Moreover, the film does not defend Dillinger as a Robin Hood figure, as a man who brought some excitement and vindictive joy to the hearts and minds of the millions of people suffering under the Great Depression. Instead, it depicts him stealing from corporate institutions, prepared to kill in order to defend himself and his liberties, and not using his acquired capital for morally beneficial purposes. What remains untouched by the film—the in-depth psychological impressions, the intricacies of Dillinger's relationship with Frechette, the anachronistic shuffling of the chronology of events—is left openly ambiguous.

The film's focus on the romance of Dillinger and Frechette seems more closely associated with another subgenre of the crime film, the couple-on-the-run movie, such

as *You Only Live Once* (1937) and *Gun Crazy* (1950), as opposed to centring on the fraternal relationships that often figured at the heart of the classical gangster picture, such as the Cain and Abel stories of Tommy and Mike in *The Public Enemy*, Blackie and Jim in *Manhattan Melodrama*, and Rocky and Jerry in *Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938). Evidently at work is a central public-private dynamic that informs the protagonist's actions and sympathies in making the distinction between the private nature of Dillinger's relationship with Frechette and his public role as both leader of his gang and Public Enemy No. 1. While originally expressive of an autonomous quotidian world, Frechette's awareness and subsequent complicity in Dillinger's criminal activities means that she is no longer able to represent socially acceptable normality. Dillinger's candidness about his work means their relationship is one that is inextricably tied to this professional world, a world geared towards tragedy and decay. Theirs is a relationship that concisely demonstrates their mutual attraction and gives the impression that, as people on the fringe of civilised society, they do not need to indulge themselves in courtship and the exchanging of backstories.

Dillinger's brief explanation of his past reveals more about the immediate nature of the man than acting as an exposition of his internal psychology: "I was raised on a farm in Mooresville, Indiana. My mama died when I was three. My daddy beat the hell out of me 'cause he didn't know no better way to raise me. I like baseball, movies, good clothes, fast cars, whiskey, and you. What else do you need to know?" Having mentioned to Dillinger that she is part Native American, Frechette rather firmly states, "Some men don't like that," to which he retorts, "I'm not most men." This line says a great deal about their relationship, outlining their connection as one based on

emotional forthrightness and sexual exoticism, but is also significant in terms of what elements of romance are and are not dramatised within the film. For instance, the film draws further attention to Billie's social standing when Dillinger takes her out to dinner, where she believes the other patrons are staring at her because she is wearing a $3 dress rather than due to her beauty or grace. An over-the-shoulder shot (Figure 2.24) fails to emphasise the looks of others, however, or that she is being observed at all for that matter, but Dillinger is able to construe her comment into a statement about his personal ideology: "That's 'cause they're all about where people come from. The only thing important is where somebody's going." This can be contrasted with a subsequent scene in which Dillinger apologises for leaving Billie at the restaurant when he meets some associates. Dillinger's action of holding out her coat (Figure 2.25)—for a coat-check girl, naturally—presents itself as a generic flash of romance, a chivalrous gesture that frees her of her previously mundane life.[518] Scenes of action in the film offer a reconciliation of Dillinger's soft romanticism and the hard leadership skills affected in his public persona. Indeed, some of Dillinger's most intimate and self-defining human interactions occur through his criminal activity, often when in conflict with the despotic forces around him.

As the central figure, Dillinger does not slot easily into the troubling paradox of the gangster described by Warshow: he expresses a desire for company, not for assimilation, existing as a functioning part of society, protected by the anonymity of living among the general populace. His proclamation of his true profession to Billie on their first date marks him out as an entrusting, dangerous, yet still enigmatic

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[518] This scene also refers back to an earlier romantic interlude in which Dillinger wraps Billie in his coat as they leave the bar to go to the restaurant.

individual, and his actions re-enforce his feelings for her. Dillinger's activities are not individual but his actions are, positioned as both more important than his cohorts and superior to them: his ability to deal with people—at times with a strong hand—as well as his mastery of mechanisms of action (the automobile, the Tommy gun) denotes him as autonomous and directorial. The sense of loneliness (specifically male loneliness) pervades Mann's work, and is particularly acute in *Public Enemies* during the sequence in which Dillinger is gunned down outside the Biograph Theater, his isolation within the frame acting as an emblematic expression of his solitude and his overwhelming by circumstance that others have formulated. Dillinger leaves the social space of the cinema to embark on the loneliest journey of all: death. He is framed by the cityscape, a backdrop that emphasises not his alienation but his failure to fully integrate himself within this society and its ultimate rejection of him.

The revisionist and retro gangster cycles

If the early gangster cycle was "more parts Capone than Dillinger" in its focus on the syndicated criminal figure, and the postwar gangster film was a brief and violent re-awakening of the controversial aspects of the genre, the re-imagining of the Depression-era gangster in the late 1960s and 1970s was a sign of the Dillinger strain of American criminality returning to popular consciousness, with a greater focus on the Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic heritage of Dillinger, Bonnie and Clyde, and the Barker Gang as opposed to the hyphenated American legacy of Capone, Dion O'Banion, and Hymie Weiss.[519] Given that these bandit figures were spread throughout the American Midwest and were native-born, the earlier focus on ethnic criminals suggests that

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[519] Doherty, *Pre-code Hollywood*, p. 140. John Baxter specifies that Weiss was the basis for the figure of Tom Powers (James Cagney) in *The Public Enemy*. See Baxter, *The Gangster Film* (London, Zwemmer, 1970), p. 35.

"Hollywood preferred to portray the gangster as a foreign infestation rather than a homegrown plague,"[520] according to Thomas Doherty. The gangster genre entered the 1960s with a cycle of films that revisited and reflected on previous generic configurations in the form of the nostalgic biopic, made up of films such as *Baby Face Nelson* (1957), *Machine Gun Kelly* (1958), *The Bonnie Parker Story* (1958), *Al Capone* (1959), and *Pretty Boy Floyd* (1960). This cycle subsequently led to a more violent re-examination of gangster subjects after the relaxation of the Production Code in *Bonnie and Clyde*, *The St. Valentine's Day Massacre*, *Lucky Luciano* (1973), and *Dillinger*. Doherty says of this cycle: "The historical evocation in these films is not postmodern nostalgia, with its desire to evoke a cultural cohesion or full individuality mythically located in the past, but an internalised generic nostalgia which both mythologises and demythologises historical gangster figures."[521] This dialectic between mythology and demystification is expressed in the structuring of these films around particular character traits—often psychological—that made them extra-ordinary, thus addressing their rise to success and ultimate downfall. The gangsters' unique individuality is mythologised whereas the aberrance of their behaviour stresses their anti-social nature, thus serving to demystify these figures. These films were notable for their stylistic excess regarding the ruthlessness and violent nature of the characters, particularly when freed from the constraints of the Production Code.

Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* is the most significant of these films that emerged from the modernist phase of the mid-1960s, an age of uncertainty wherein the meaning of a film became so heavily tied in with the culture from which it emerged.

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[520] Doherty, *Pre-code Hollywood*, p. 140.
[521] Mason, *American Gangster Cinema*, p. 122.

As Jack Shadoian says, this was a period in which "[t]he nature of the relationship between art and the audience (and art and reality) undergoes a major shift."[522] This shift is an ideological one in terms of reflecting and revisioning the ideologies and generic structures previously expressed by classical Hollywood cinema. Fran Mason sees the cultural context that accompanies the changing axis of the gangster genre as being of great importance: "not only does the production of films occur within a changing society of countercultural protest and increased commodification, but transformations in the economic and cultural spheres make themselves heard within the meanings and formal structures of the films themselves."[523] *Bonnie and Clyde*, as perhaps the most important illustration of the post-classical/revisionist cycle, is significant in the manner by which it exceeds and evokes generic conventions, and, together with *Dillinger*, it foregrounds its historical gangster figures and presents them as "spectacles of entertainment rather than as documentary records."[524] There is greater depth in their approach to the representation of history which suggests why Mason does not consider this pair of films as part of his retro cycle: "They use their accounts of historical figures to reflect on contemporary culture and articulations of power, generating both nostalgia and renewal in this process."[525] The two films have differing cultural effects, however, bookending this period of counter-cultural expression in America, and I will return to this period in the following section.

In an essay on the "retro" pastiche gangster film cycle of the 1990s, Esther Sonnet and Peter Stanfield suggest that the "replaying" of the 1930s gangster films operates on

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[522] Shadoian, *Dreams and Dead Ends*, p. 236.
[523] Mason, *American Gangster Cinema*, pp. 120-121.
[524] Ibid., p. 123.
[525] Ibid.

the covert terrain of sexual politics, where nostalgic invocation of period setting is ideally placed to articulate fears and pleasures in the recuperation of "lost" gender certainties.[526] Citing such films as *Miller's Crossing*, *Billy Bathgate* (1991), *Bullets Over Broadway* (1994), and *The Newton Boys*, they see the retro gangster cycle as a vehicle for retrogressive, antifeminist and hypermasculinised ideologies by constructing social worlds predicated on the absence of women and made meaningful only by the homosocial bonds formed by men.[527]   Importantly, this cycle shared "a common concern for crime-led narratives located in *historical* rather than contemporary settings,"[528] a return to the figures of Prohibition and the Great Depression. However, rather than being explicitly historical texts that worked through issues of past representation or socio-political events, these films were superficially orientated in terms of iconography and style. For instance, the role played by fashion in earlier gangster films attested to "a dense symbolic exchange around the liminal and provisional status of criminal identity," as well as being imbued with political significance in their questioning of the legitimacy of class, wealth, and self-ownership.[529] In the retro gangster films of the 1990s, however, historical context and

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[526] Esther Sonnet and Peter Stanfield, '"Good Evening Gentlemen; Can I Check Your Hats Please?" Masculinity, Dress, and the Retro Gangster Cycles of the 1990s' in Lee Grieveson, Esther Sonnet and Peter Stanfield (eds.), *Mob Culture: Hidden Histories of the American Gangster Film* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), pp. 163-184. Other examples from this cycle include: *The Lost Capone* (1990), *Mobsters* (1991), *Oscar* (1991), *A Rage in Harlem* (1991), *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1995), *The Funeral* (1996), *Last Man Standing* (1996), *Trigger Happy* (1996), *Hoodlum* (1997), and *Lansky* (1999). Some of these feature biographical narratives, some are adaptations of fictional works, and others are based on original, non-biographical material. They also identify *The Untouchables* as the instigator for this retro cycle, a film that "exemplifies narratives that invoke the past as a nostalgic "return" to unchallenged patriarchal masculine integrity" (ibid., p. 166).

[527] The cycle also demonstrates fears over the loss of masculine control and "hysterical" representations of hegemonic masculinity in which meaningful distinctions between homosocial, homosexual, and violent impulses are collapsed.

[528] Ibid., p. 164.

[529] In reference to the importance of men's style in the gangster film, Sonnet and Stanfield state, "hats in the first and subsequent cycles of 1930s gangster films were given thematic, formal, and symbolic emphases quite distinct from those that characterize the 1990s retro gangster cycle. Even a short cultural history of hats in titles of this period suggests an intimate connection between the gangster film

reference is relatively minor, with Sonnet and Stanfield viewing this cycle as being defined by "the very absence of any social, economic, or political resonance."[530]

More recent gangster texts, such as *Road to Perdition*, *Boardwalk Empire* and *Public Enemies* operate differently by dealing more directly with history and positioning themselves within a more explicitly historical framework. This construction and historical codification operates in opposition to the notion of historical pastiche imbued in the retro cycle and its failure to achieve true historical consciousness, relating to Fredric Jameson's seminal analysis of this subject in which he observes that the postmodern cultural condition is one "beyond history."[531] Jameson sees historical perspective as the marker of critical distance, something denied by contemporary replays of modes and styles and replaced by intertextuality as "a deliberate, built-in feature of the aesthetic effect," as the "operator of a new connotation of 'pastness' and pseudo-historical depth, in which the history of aesthetic styles displaces 'real' history."[532] Sonnet and Stanfield state that, "Without the critical distance that would permit meaningful historical connection to the past, retro films overinvest in the presentation of surface styling and in generating surface connotations of 'pastness'

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and the shifting historical configuration of masculinity through its "dressing" (ibid., pp. 166-167). This cycle uses the hat as a way of creating a "*falsified* certainty" around masculinity, distinct from its previous historical function as "signifier of cultural *inversion*." The gangster figure expresses a specific relation to dress and display, in which criminality relates "as much to the gangster's exposure of the cultural instability of the categories of class, ethnicity, and consumption as to formal law breaking" (ibid., p. 174). Particular visual codes mark the progress of the ascendant gangster in which the hat (whether derby or fedora) "functions as the signifier of his temporal and figurative distance from the simply criminal. As such, the gangster's hat symbolizes a larger experience of modernity in which troubling dissolutions of traditional moral, economic, and class parameters are signified through conflations of crime with social dissembling" (ibid., p. 174).

[530] Ibid.

[531] Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Culture', in Hal Foster (ed.), *Postmodern Culture* (London: Pluto, 1983), p. 117.

[532] Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', *New Left Review* 146 (July-August 1984), p. 67.

through 'period' architecture, dress, interiors, fabrics, fashion, hair, and makeup." [533] Films of the 1990s retro cycle demonstrate a lack of historical depth, relying on the cinematic significations formed by the confluence of an emphasis on intertextuality and a heightened set of retro characteristics.

The fact that the retro gangster film actively dehistoricises the cultural artifacts that it seeks to explicate through its emphasis on these surface qualities has implications regarding the effect (and affect) that digital lends to the genre: there appears to be even greater emphasis on surface, on the details and the overall mise-en-scène in the manner in which it is displayed with greater clarity and focus. Concomitantly, the immediacy of the digital aesthetic encourages a more direct engagement with history, one in which the notion of pastiche seems to be absent (with the exception of Stephen Graham's depiction of Baby Face Nelson).[534] However, while *Public Enemies* and other contemporary gangster texts have moved past this postmodern tradition of failing to deal with time and history, other texts such as *Gangster Squad* (2013) and the James Ellroy adaptation *The Black Dahlia* (2006) demonstrate a continued relationship with the "empty," dehistoricised evocations of the past.[535]

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[533] Sonnet and Stanfield, '"Good Evening Gentlemen; Can I Check Your Hats Please?"', pp. 175-176.

[534] Here, the intertextuality relates to the historical basis of this character on ones presented by Hollywood itself during that period, thus relating to the dynamic between Dillinger and Gable in *Manhattan Melodrama*.

[535] It is necessary to note that both *Gangster Squad* and *The Black Dahlia* are set in the 1940s (1949 and 1947 respectively) and draw more heavily from film noir rather than classical gangster cinema in narrative and aesthetic terms. While both texts feature real-life criminal cases, they are only loosely based on historical events (see Andrew O'Hehir, '"Gangster Squad" whitewashes the LAPD's criminal past', *Salon* [Online] 10 January 2013. Available at: http://www.salon.com/2013/01/10/gangster_squad_whitewashes_the_lapds_criminal_past/), accessed 29/10/13. Incidentally, *Gangster Squad* was shot digitally (using Arri Alexa and Phantom Flex cameras), but has a much glossier, stylised Hollywood look as opposed to the realist, immediate handheld aesthetic of *Public Enemies* that strives for a form of historical realism.

The return to a more historicised form of the gangster film, achieved in large part due to the digital aesthetic, signifies a reinvigoration of historical consciousness in terms of cultural significance. *Public Enemies* can be positioned within a contemporary digital framework that engages with the past by using modern, digital cinematic techniques to form a more culturally specific and historically precise text. While the retro cycle of the 1990s underlined the central fascination of the genre with masculinity and prevailing concerns and uncertainties surrounding dominant male identity (reflected in the fashions and other surface distinctions), *Public Enemies* allows for greater extension into other thematic territories, and manages to locate them within a broader historicity of culture.

Bonnie and Clyde: crime as media expression

Regarding the celebration of criminality, Diane Carson argues:

> Popular culture perpetuates and embellishes tales of criminals who capture our imagination. And of all the media, cinema most powerfully romanticizes the lives of infamous individuals, reinventing them to the measure of our desire, replacing fact with a compelling fiction that becomes accepted "truth." […] filmic representation supplies our images, often to the exclusion of more factual interpretations.[536]

This is most certainly the case with *Bonnie and Clyde*, a film with great visceral impact and style that has dominated the historical and biographical discourse of this illustrious pairing. Robert Benton and David Newman used John Toland's 1963 book *The Dillinger Days* as their primary source material, leading to the incorporation of several elements from Dillinger's criminal exploits into the depiction of Bonnie (Faye Dunaway) and

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[536] Diane Carson, '"It's Never the Way I Knew Them": Searching for Bonnie and Clyde' in Lester D. Friedman (ed.), *Arthur Penn's Bonnie and Clyde* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 43.

Clyde (Warren Beatty).[537]   Penn's film was not especially weighted in historical accuracy—even the captions displayed at the opening of the film are factually incorrect[538]—and several events were excised from the film's narrative such as the car accident that occurred in June 1933 in which Bonnie received severe burns to her legs.[539] *Bonnie and Clyde* offers a very different depiction of Depression-era 1930s to *Public Enemies*, but the fact that the film also incorporated several iconic events, descriptions and maxims from Dillinger's life emphasises the connections between the two films.

According to Steven Allen Carr, *Bonnie and Clyde* expresses "a mainstreaming of deviancy" through its use of excessive and expressive violence.[540]   The marginality of Bonnie and Clyde from society as a whole is emphasised to distance them from the American Dream, a concept key to the classic gangster cycle.   According to Mason, their criminality "highlights their 'deviancy' and uncontainability within official ideologies" and is thus "more an expression of oppositionality that leads nowhere rather than a positive response to social oppression."[541]   The impotence and sexual dysfunction that characterises the protagonists' relationship can be contrasted to the comparative sexual normalcy of *Public Enemies*, evidenced by a comical foreplay scene that makes reference to the legend of Dillinger's penis: as Billie reclines in the bath,

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[537] These lives of these two figures are also examined in great deal in Bryan Burrough's *Public Enemies: America's Greatest Crime Wave and the Birth of the FBI, 1933-34* (London: Penguin Books, 2004).
[538] The captions state that Bonnie began her career in crime in 1931 and that Clyde was released from prison in the same year. In reality, Bonnie and Clyde met in January 1930, before Clyde was incarcerated. Stephen Hunter also addresses the film's infidelity to historical truth: see Stephen Hunter, 'Clyde and Bonnie Died for Nihilism' in *Commentary* [Online], July 2009). Available at: http://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/clyde-and-bonnie-died-for-nihilism/, accessed 19/07/12.
[539] Incidentally, this incident is covered in far greater detail in Burrough's book.
[540] Steven Allen Carr, 'From "Fucking Cops" to "Fucking Media!": *Bonnie and Clyde* for a Sixties America', in Friedman (ed.), *Arthur Penn's Bonnie and Clyde*, p. 72.
[541] Mason, *American Gangster Cinema*, p. 126.

Dillinger drawls, "How's about me and my friend Prince Albert come and pay you a visit?"[542] This relates more generally to the contrast between the aesthetic pleasure of crime (particularly bank heists) in *Public Enemies* and the "libidinous pleasure" of crime in *Bonnie and Clyde*, comprised of light-hearted moments that represent both a "release from social constraints" and "an expression of individual freedom."[543] *Bonnie and Clyde* links crime with sex in a way that *Public Enemies* does not: Dillinger's charm convinces others to carry out his directions, while his brief hostage-taking of women demonstrates a level of respect with no sexual element, as these actions are taken solely to protect himself and his crew. Dillinger's gifting of sexual satisfaction is in contrast to Clyde's sexual inadequacy, demonstrating how the central relationships of each film are represented with divergent stresses on sexuality and violence as central themes.

The representation of crime as part of media culture is a form of expression shared by both films. Crime news became its own form of popular entertainment in the 1930s, reflecting the broader commercial and political culture of the era in its sensationalism that is familiar to current and longstanding attitudes to celebrity conjecture.[544] The protagonists in both films are highly aware of their public identities and personas and

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[542] In his book about Al Capone, Laurence Bergreen states that Dillinger "resembled a nightmarish version of Clark Gable: thick hair, neat mustache, perpetual snarl, and chilling, feral eyes. He was a loner, a thrill seeker, and a renowned lover. Popular lore had it that his penis was extraordinarily long, but there is no evidence to support the claim" (Bergreen, *Capone*, p. 531).

[543] Mason, *American Gangster Cinema*, p. 126. But Mason also emphasises the way in which crime is presented as a form of entrapment, a "replication of habitual mundanity found in legitimate expressions of 'labour'," confirming that crime is intrinsically linked to death (ibid.).

[544] Apropos of this, Claire Bond Potter states: "Reporters, newsreel makers, and sentimental writers produced audiences for the Dillinger manhunt by exploring bandit crime through familiar, and personal, narratives. Inventing connections between bandits and hinting at links to local politicians and police officials, they renarrativized crime as part of a nationalist exchange between ordinary citizens" (Potter, *War on Crime*, p. 140). The national fascination with bandits was dealt with by the Department of Justice who created a legislative package that would restore respectability through the suppression of crime and confer national police powers to the Bureau of Investigation. This "New Deal for Crime" evoked "the dangers of the psychopathic criminal," recast as the public enemy (ibid., p.105).

are conscious of how others perceive them: Bonnie and Clyde pose for photographs at several points in the film (Figures 2.26 and 2.27), and Dillinger's aforementioned encounter with prosecutor Robert Estill highlights his relaxed, affable manner in front of the press. While Dillinger seems more protective over his public image, Bonnie and Clyde are more concerned with how their fame is influenced by their success as bank robbers, simultaneously articulating their criminal acts as a way in which fame and notoriety can be achieved, and locating them as commodified images that exist within a cultural spectacle. Both of these codings appear to be in opposition to their identifying political principles, thus rendering them as false, undeveloped, or simply ambiguous. Beyond their relationships with the media, there are further similarities between Clyde Barrow and John Dillinger in terms of their self-awareness and in their inherent fatalism given their frequent and violent collisions with the State. We are only given a brief history of the characters in both films, and while the representation of Dillinger is more deliberately opaque and prosaic, it also sidesteps emotional attachments to family or the past by referring only briefly to prior events and choosing not to focus on earlier mistakes that have led to a loss of autonomy.

The films are also distinct on the levels of performance and behaviour, as the figures of *Bonnie and Clyde* are more openly mythologised: "By giving so many examples of playacting […], the movie comments ironically on its own patina of vivacity, the heroic imagery with which it burnishes the gang members' characters,"[545] writes Nicole Rafter. Bonnie is torn between her desire to "play" the lady and her initial attraction to Clyde when they meet, with Clyde indulging this impulse in telling her, "I bet you're

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[545] Nicole Rafter, *Shots in the Mirror: Crime Films and Society* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 158.

a movie star." Blanche (Estelle Parsons), Clyde's sister-in-law, also seems to adapt her mannerisms to the situation, as if never at ease with herself, while Clyde's gangster persona is conducted as performance, pure showmanship. Bonnie and Clyde are also active in the creation of their mythology, in achieving popular status famously through the abovementioned photographs they take of themselves or with their captives, and Bonnie's documenting of events through poetry, most notably 'The Story of Bonnie and Clyde'.[546] These substantially iconographic moments are critiqued by the fact that the bandits are surrounded by characters far less self-conscious than themselves, individuals such as C.W. Moss (Michael J. Pollard) and Bonnie's mother (Mabel Cavitt) who offer a certain critical distance. Depp's Dillinger is less romanticised, less easy to empathise with because the film neither downplays his negative traits nor plays up his virtuous, heroic qualities. The mythic elements of Dillinger within American popular culture—his "Robin Hood" attributes—are undercut in *Public Enemies* by the lack of exposition regarding Dillinger's past, or the reasons and motivations for his crimes, instead presenting him as an ambivalent, highly professional criminal.

Narratives of disappointment and historical (dis)engagement

Fran Mason sees the cultural vision of *Bonnie and Clyde*'s as existing "in a culture of protest and opposition to the State and ideology, but mutes its counter-cultural vision by offering a politics of escape rather than a politics of social engagement and transformation of ideology and institutions."[547] This rearticulation of a historical

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[546] While Bonnie only recites part of the poem in the film (seven of the eleven stanzas), it is narrated over a very effective montage that shows her reading it aloud to Clyde (who suggests forwarding it to the press), Frank Hamer discovering a clipping of the poem, and Bonnie once again reading it for Clyde, this time from the newspaper. The complete poem is published in Appendix C of Carson, '"It's Never the Way I Knew Them"', pp. 65-66.

[547] Mason, *American Gangster Cinema*, p. 125.

setting to comment on contemporary society draws the two periods together, "suggesting that the oppressions in 1960s America are the product of the same forms of capitalist exploitation that produced the Depression."[548] This is a key way in which the film reflects on its own pastness, by aligning two social eras and not focusing directly on the historical significance of the Depression.   *Public Enemies* codifies its era differently by creating and locating itself both spatially and temporally within a historical setting largely free from deliberate allegory or social commentary.   For instance, when Bonnie and Clyde happen upon a dispossessed farmer, who says of his house, "The bank took it. Yessir, they moved us off. Now it belongs to them," this scene locates us squarely within the socio-economic context of the Depression; Clyde's subsequent statement, "We rob banks," represents their empathising with the plight of the oppressed and locates them politically as oppositional to capitalism and institutions of the State. In *Public Enemies*, when Dillinger says, "I'm John Dillinger. I rob banks" in response to Billie's question about what he does for a living, it is a statement of fact about his profession, an assertion both hubristic and honest with which he chooses to begin a relationship as opposed to a comment on the attitude that informs his criminal activity. In contrast, Bonnie and Clyde become romantic heroes precisely because they believe they are fighting against something, and therefore they present a social message of opposition.

Rafter believes the film, in its setting, camerawork, and use of colour and music, is constructed to "increase the heroic qualities of Bonnie and Clyde."[549] The setting of *Bonnie and Clyde* in the rural Texas of the 1930s distances us from their criminality—

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[548] Ibid.
[549] Rafter, *Shots in the Mirror*, p. 158.

underscored by the use of comical bluegrass music—and the golden glow of the imagery and the use of close-ups emphasises the mythic status of its protagonists. This is the opposite of what Mann achieves in bringing the spectator as close to Dillinger as possible; he is looking for a heightened engagement in contrast to Penn's sensation of detachment. The oneiric, idealised picnic scene in *Bonnie and Clyde* (Figure 2.28), with its framing as a hazy memory through the use of soft-focus, slow-motion and saturated colour, highlights how the past—most notably the Depression era—has been revisioned from a 1960s perspective.[550] John Raeburn believes the Depression "provides a context in which their search for personal authenticity and intimacy—themes of the 1960s, not the 1930s—may be detached from the particular social confusions of the Vietnam period and at the same time evoke it by suggesting a culture in which the individual's fate is problematic."[551] *Bonnie and Clyde* is less about ambition for personal success and more about how criminality—or, more generally, aggression against social order—leads to fame and/or fortune. Unlike the criminal acts of Dillinger and his gang which are situated historically, the crimes perpetrated by Bonnie and Clyde operate as fantasies of violent aggression. *Public Enemies* is a far less reflective text in this regard, commensurate with its narrative's forward-thinking ideology; there is no moment of regret or contemplation of what went wrong, what aspects could have been improved. In *Bonnie and Clyde*, in the post-coital, pre-death scene, Bonnie looks both to the future, asking why Clyde would want to marry her, and to the past: "What would you do if some miracle happened and we could walk out of here tomorrow morning and start all over again clean, with no record, with nobody

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[550] The huge success of *Bonnie and Clyde* led to a minor resurgence of Depression-era gangster films, such as *Dillinger*, *Bloody Mama* (1970), and *Big Bad Mama* (1974), with *Badlands* as a significant derivative.

[551] John Raeburn, 'The Gangster Film', in Wes D. Gehring (ed.), *Handbook of American Film Genres* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), p. 56.

after us?" Although Clyde responds by saying he would merely look to improve his criminal skills and conduct rather than choosing a separate path entirely, this form of inquisitorial impulse is one that simply does not exist in *Public Enemies*, either in terms of Billie's questioning of Dillinger or at the level of self-examination. However, while this may demonstrate, as Raeburn believes, that "Bonnie comes to understand her fate, as Clyde never fully does,"[552] it also suggests that Dillinger implicitly shares Bonnie's recognition of fate and mortality. The realisation that their eventual demise will derive from their criminal exertions and the acceptance of the inevitable gives all the figures a tragic stature, permeating and overshadowing each film.

For Jack Shadoian, the displacement into the past functions as an "unreality", providing a framework for a series of oppositions that may be too provocative or challenging in present terms, thus using this past to comment on the present.[553] *Bonnie and Clyde* therefore has a different relationship with the past in its creation of a form of unreality to comment on the reality of the present, whereas *Public Enemies* is fixed in a hyperreal past that emphasises its temporality through thematic and narrative immediacy. However, there is an aesthetic connection in that both films are forcing the viewer to confront this time by presenting a familiar narrative and period in a new way. *Bonnie and Clyde* utilises its displaced unreality of the past and *Public Enemies* creates a densely realised near-present in order to involve the viewer within two different historical contexts. The more rigorous and nuanced depiction of the past in *Public Enemies* seems to undermine Shadoian's belief that the gangster film has increasingly divorced itself from reality:

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[552] Ibid.
[553] Shadoian, *Dreams and Dead Ends*, p. 238.

> The gangster (and the gangster film) is no longer to be confused with reality but is obviously an imaginative accretion of the culture's schizophrenia and five decades of finding out how celluloid can be used and joined. The genre no longer records, or elaborates on headlines; it fashions poems, dreams, epics, myths.[554]

Through readdressing the historical nature of events and re-constructing (or re-enacting) an immersive, presentness of the past, *Public Enemies* demonstrates how realism has been re-introduced into the gangster narrative, and how historical figures do not necessarily have to be mythologised or eulogised. While the response of the genre to a lack of contemporary material is often a reflection back into the past, the genre and the medium itself, this does not always create a disjuncture from the realist nature of the gangster film. The subject matter of *Public Enemies* is of intrinsic interest rather than merely serving metaphorically or allegorically for other issues, and its high regard for the historical and factual discourse determines an enhanced engagement with forms of filmic history, its representations, manifestations, associations, and repercussions.

While *Bonnie and Clyde* evokes a degree of period sentiment in its revisionism of the 1930s, there is an overbearing sense of folly, of ironic detachment conveyed in being aware of the couple's illusions about life and about themselves. The film distances itself into the past to create and maintain this sense of illusion rather than presenting us with a nostalgic view of this particular era in American culture. Mason sees this as evidenced through its presentation of violence and corruption, depicting it as "an everyday occurrence implying that as an endemic part of American society it is not the

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[554] Ibid., p. 240.

product of a distinct period, but pervades American history up to the present."[555] The

representation of the period is not one that is representative of the actual Depression-

era 1930s, rather an impalpable era that is distanced from both present and historical

reality. The static, tableau compositions of *Bonnie and Clyde* (such as the dreamlike

picnic scene and its staged moments of violence) lack the density and tactility of

reality, particularly in contrast to the constantly moving camera of *Public Enemies* that

endeavours to erode the artificiality of the staging, with the fluidity of small, handheld

cameras locating scenes within a more expansive historical space.

Moral engagement and the historical reassessment of violence

Bonnie and Clyde's treatment of violence is inseparable from issues of censorship that

surround the repeal of the Motion Picture Production Code in September 1966. This

revision scrapped their extensive rules on such subjects as violence, sexuality, religion,

crime, and marriage, and replaced them with several guiding principles designed to

"move cinema closer to the mores characteristic of modern society and a more

permissive era and to expand the creative freedom of filmmakers."[556] This is reflected

in the more explicit and stylised representations of violence in *Bonnie and Clyde*.

Howard Hughes identifies the major consequences of this changing attitude to

violence: "the protracted and graphic and the 'wasting' of human life is cheered,

applauded, and laughed at, as well as shuddered at. The distancing aesthetic

exaggerations […] are signs of a modernist consciousness successfully grafted onto

popular entertainment."[557] This tonal shift is palpable in *Bonnie and Clyde*, with the

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[555] Mason, *American Gangster Cinema*, p. 125.
[556] Stephen Prince, 'The Hemorrhaging of American Cinema: Bonnie and Clyde's Legacy of Cinematic Violence' in Friedman (ed.), *Arthur Penn's Bonnie and Clyde*, p. 132.
[557] Hughes, *Crime Wave*, p. 241.

violence being problematic principally due to its treatment as light spectacle, punctuated by moments of horror. The comedic nature of the criminality—such as Moss parallel parking outside the bank—is further enhanced by the exaggerated, anachronistic bluegrass music.

Of all the violent acts in the film, the death of eponymous characters has drawn the most attention, being perhaps one of the most critically-considered sequences in the study of film. Stephen Prince believes the final bloody montage of *Bonnie and Clyde* "inaugurated the modern cinema of ultraviolence,"[558] adding that, "Of all the film's stylistic innovations, Penn's visualization of Bonnie and Clyde's deaths has had the most lasting impact on American cinema."[559] This scene does not require any further textual analysis, but the way the scene's technical elements feed into the characters' meaning and resonance is of importance. The fast cutting between the faces of Bonnie (Figure 2.29) and Clyde (Figure 2.30) at their collective moment of realisation creates an explicit romantic connection, supported by Clyde's desperate attempt to return to her in the car; but how does this relate to the moral disenfranchisement of the characters? The technical components of this scene—the use of slow-motion, multiple cameras/angles and montage editing—create a visual spectacle of violence, but one that Prince sees as "often disconnected from the pain and suffering of its bloody victims."[560] The manner in which Bonnie and Clyde are killed, torn apart in a hail of bullets, martyrs them; the same can be said of Dillinger's death, but *Public Enemies* has not presented us with victims of its protagonist's actions in the same way that *Bonnie and Clyde* has done, and thus does not display the same moral indifference. Despite

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[558] Prince, 'The Hemorrhaging of American Cinema', p. 145.
[559] Ibid., p. 135.
[560] Ibid., p. 143.

the moral distancing of these robber lovers, the final scene was one that, as Pauline Kael wrote, "put the sting back into death."[561] The relationship between moral engagement and aesthetics is altered when framed by high definition digital, in part due to associations with documentary and objective realism that prompt moral engagement. Mann is a director with a bold expressionistic impetus, and the opposition of the mimetic and the didactic—the interpretative performance versus the intention to instruct or convey information—is at the heart of this debate.

In both films we have a sense of the overwhelming firepower deployed against the outlaws, and the intense physical impact of the bullets, but the precessional, choreographed nature of Dillinger's killing carries a different kind of weight. While the death of Dillinger is expected and, indeed, even required of the narrative, it is more overtly planned and conducted by Purvis and his team; it is an execution colder and more calculated in its preparation and operation, one that makes the viewer participatory and therefore complicit. Unlike the sudden, abrupt flashes of violence that punctuate the deaths of Bonnie and Clyde, the killing of Dillinger is far more protracted. This is an event that the characters, and thus the spectators, are primed for: Dillinger prepares for his evening, shaving and looking at an image of Billie in his pocket watch; in the same montage Purvis gives out his instructions briefly but concisely, positioning his agents and informing them of the signal for when Dillinger leaves the Biograph. We wait, as they do, for Dillinger to emerge; as he does so, slow-motion is employed to elongate his actions, giving his movements a burdensome quality. Rather than creating a sense of "disconnect[ion] from the pain and suffering"

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[561] Pauline Kael, 'Onward and Upward with the Arts: "Bonnie and Clyde"', *The New Yorker* (21 October 1967), p. 171. Available online at: http://archives.newyorker.com/?i=1967-10-21#folio=170, accessed 12/12/11.

that Prince identifies in *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Public Enemies* is actively establishing

sensory and psychological connections with Dillinger's situation.[562]

Purvis, Charles Winstead (Stephen Lang) and the other agents converge on Dillinger.

Agent Reinecke (Adam Mucci) walks behind Dillinger, pointing his gun at the back of

his head; he is held in both a medium shot (Figure 2.31) and staged in deep space in a

close-up of Dillinger (Figure 2.32), and this is combined with the film speed slowing

even further, with the following shot a gradual track up behind Dillinger (Figure 2.33).

When Dillinger turns to face him, his stare accentuated by an extreme close-up of his

eyes (Figure 2.34), Reinecke fails to pull the trigger. Winstead fires at the back of

Dillinger's head from close range, instigating a series of subsequent gunshots, though

Purvis notably hesitates and fails to fire. The first bullet exits through Dillinger's right

cheek, and the camera moves downward as Dillinger falls to the ground (Figure 2.35),

giving the sensation that we fall *with* him, similar to the death of Ernesto Guevara in

Che discussed in Chapter One. The slow motion continues for a moment as Purvis

registers the events that have just occurred and the fact that Dillinger is dying, before

Winstead leans in to hear Dillinger's last, muffled words. The sequence is followed by

quick cuts of images that show the gathering, clamouring crowds, and ends with a long

aerial shot of the scene (Figure 2.36), the only shot of this nature in the entire film.

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[562] Vivian Sobchack finds the increasing popularity of digital slow motion allows us to "take time out of" and simultaneously visually interrogate "the increasing accelerations of cinematic and social life" (Sobchack, '"Cutting to the Quick"', p. 342). Significantly, it also recalls Laura Mulvey's notion of the "clumsy sublime," in which image compositing fails to complete the illusion of spatiotemporal coherence yet still "fascinates "because of, not in spite of its clumsy visibility" (Mulvey, 'A Clumsy Sublime', *Film Quarterly* 60:3 [Spring 2007], p. 3). Instead of locating the profilmic body in an indeterminate spatiotemporality, the handheld digital imagery of *Public Enemies* is distinct in that it disrupts the spatiotemporal coherence not necessarily of real life, but that of conventional cinema. Static framings of classical, or classically-shot, period or gangster films are radically transformed by a jittery and emphatically mobile camera, intensifying motion and action.

This scene, lit mostly by flares, emphasises both the scale of the event and the speed with which the scene outside the Biograph has become a media circus.

The proximity of the camera to Dillinger, tracking from both the front (Figure 2.32) and the rear (Figure 2.33), combined with the heavy, drawn-out quality of the slow-motion, attunes the viewer to the sustained sense of emotional and psychological components of his death. The positioning of the camera offers up two oppositional forms of subjectivity, thus providing a sense of Dillinger's awareness of his situation and the perspective of the FBI agents approaching him from behind. The close-ups in this scene hold very tight to the face with a strong focus on the eyes, and the elongation of the scene's temporality transforms his swagger into a series of protracted movements, each leading him a step closer to his death. Mann is making the audience experience the death of Dillinger in such precise and exacting detail, with hyperreal clarity, and there is an intellectual fascination to this inevitable tragedy. The spectacle and brutality of the deaths that close each film can be identified as depicting a confrontation with mortality, but we are pushed so close to Dillinger as he reacts to his condition—and the sequence is conveyed at such a heightened level of hyperrealism— that it is able to more forcefully render the physical and psychological impact of these actions.

Bonnie and Clyde presents an overwhelmingly violent and descriptive dénouement but denies the characters the closing line that is so central to the gangster protagonist: one can recall Cody Jarrett's (James Cagney) call of "Made it, Ma! Top of the world!" in *White Heat* (1949), or *Little Caesar*'s closing line of "Mother of mercy, is this the end of

Rico?"[563] These lines emphasise the culmination of the characters and their respective trajectories, acting as simple moral warnings concerning the pursuit of a life of crime. Although this message is communicated non-linguistically through the sudden and absolute violence of *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Public Enemies* reinforces Dillinger's execution by fixating on his barely-heard dying words that are relayed back to Billie in the closing scene of the film. The communication of these words ("Bye, bye, blackbird," quoting the song that was playing when Dillinger and Frechette first met) by Winstead (the man responsible for shooting Dillinger) provides an emotional rather than moral catharsis. This ending registers the end of Dillinger, a character in whose experience we have been immersed, while also finding a way of reinforcing the conventional romance, albeit communicated in a melancholic, slightly obscure fashion.

Conclusion

In its detached attitude to the historical significances and consequences of the period, *Bonnie and Clyde* shifted attention away from realist re-creations of history within the gangster film. In doing so, the film was able to form a new aesthetic that broke free from generic tradition, unlike the films of the fifties which continued archetypes and characteristics in different ways (particularly regarding the use of colour) without separating themselves from the past. *Public Enemies* marks a similarly substantial transition, combining newly evolved aspects of both the genre and our historical relationship with this era with a unique, modern aesthetic. The kineticised, free-flowing visual style enabled by digital capture encourages vicarious involvement in the spatial and temporal parameters of its period, allowing for a heightened degree of

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[563] Thomas Schatz writes that Rico's dying words in *Little Caesar* "reflect our own disbelief that this heroic, wilful [sic], urban demigod ever could be destroyed." Schatz, *Hollywood Genres*, p. 87. There is a disparity in why the gangster protagonist dies, what it symbolises about morality and society.

immersion and attachment, and thus historical engagement. However, the anachronistic employment of the technological in capturing the historical can only be partially successful if this unfamiliar aesthetic is not seen to be a distraction, for the incongruousness of the image may simply serve to remind the spectator that they are watching a film. Several critics, for instance, have cited the camera movements and motion blur as blighting the film's realism and detracting from its immersive qualities, distancing the viewer by making its artifice apparent.[564] While both films demonstrate an involvement with the cultural anomie, Mann's film operates on a two-tiered system of response as *Public Enemies* conveys both a truthfulness of art and a truthful account of history with which audiences can engage.

The dynamic compositions, the unstable posturing of characters, and the pattern of the editing add to the visual elements of *Public Enemies* which connect the characters to something immediate and mobile. The film's visual imagery uses a range of generic iconography but places it within an immediate, high-definition version of the past in order to amplify their particular qualities. This aesthetic approach projects an image of the past as present, of the past being experience by the viewer. *Public Enemies* also demonstrates an insistence on realistic and clearly defined-imagery in contrast to expressionistic cinematography or chiaroscuro demonstrated by both classical era gangster films and the retro gangster cycle. The way in which the film is edited further stresses the sense of immediacy by creating stylised, yet disjunctive temporal

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[564] In addition to Ty Burr and Todd McCarthy's reviews of *Public Enemies*, see those by Richard Corliss for *Time* ('Kill Dill: Depp's Dillinger Disappoints', *Time* [Online], 06 July 2009. Available at: http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1907150,00.html, accessed 29/10/13) and Dana Stevens for *Slate* ('Original Gangster: Michael Mann films the life of John Dillinger in Public Enemies', *Slate* [Online], 30 June 2009. Available at: http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/movies/2009/06/original_gangster.html, accessed 29/10/13).

relationships between shots. The cutting does not create a rhythm that conveys a specific passage of time; instead, the characters live "in the moment," existing in a state of flux.

Public Enemies is counteracting the sense that is usually conveyed by the historical film: its placement of pastness, of reconstruction, of retrograde observance. High definition brings with it the intensity and immediacy of instantaneous coverage; as opposed to the photorealism of other aesthetic approaches that emphasise the invisibility of their effects, the accenture of detail, definition and direct representation forms a hyperreal impression of the past. Cameras are given free range to whip around and delve into tight, claustrophobic areas that larger, more ungainly equipment would have found impossible, but this can also lend the image a jarring quality, and this may serve to detract from the film's immersive intentions. This aesthetic approach is an attempt to show carefully researched historical events in a fashion that is both realistic and dramatic, and the amplification or extension of features characteristic of Bordwell's theory of intensified continuity through the use of the digital camera is therefore intended to enhance both the film's realism and its historicity through a highly controlled and carefully modulated formalism.

The film's interest lies in forcefully projecting the experiences of the protagonists at the level of narration, narrowing rather than broadening its scope to stress the period's national or historical importance. The narrative leaves significant gaps in our ability to grasp the social world it depicts, containing elisions regarding basic narrative events and therefore character motivations. Other historical films have a zealous

tendency to provide details and contexts, but *Public Enemies* shifts focus away from its period detailing and onto the actions of its characters. As we have seen, this approach also shies away from character study, telling us very little about the inner lives of those involved, and only allows Dillinger to be depicted through straightforward attitudes and character traits. These two factors, combined with the film's visual style, create a pathologically constrictive viewing experience in its attempt to involve the spectator in the history it has constructed. The foregrounding of Dillinger over the rest of the "public enemies" is an isolating device, one that emphasises his exclusion of them, and the inclusion of Frechette into his world signifies the important emotional role she plays in his final weeks. The film's superficial resemblance to modern docudramas rather than classical gangster pictures induces what ultimately amounts to an inherently fatalistic point of view, albeit one that deliberately avoids social contextualisation. The central quality of this film style is that in marrying frantic, frenzied digital cinematography with a heavily detailed and finely realised period setting, and taking an opaque approach to such a generic set of gangster characters, the film makes its history depthlessly allusive and often reminds the viewer of its artifice through its digital abstractions.

While reaction to this style has been ambivalent, the emphasis on artifice to convey realism reinforces the film's desire for urgency, projecting the past into the immediate present and accentuating the movement *through* historical space. Shooting a period film digitally is an ambitious, outré technique that is not intended to prevent comprehension of the story, rather to act for textural and expressive purpose in conveying the hyperreal clarity of images and the experiencing of the past. *Public*

Enemies, with its combination of digital production, historical re-enactment and recognition of previous generic forms, represents how digital filmmaking technologies can allow for enhanced engagements with history.

Chapter Three – The Facebook Generation: Media Aesthetics, Dramatic License and
the Refiguring of the Recent Past in the Digital Biographical Film

The year of 2010 saw a continuation of the rise of the biographical film, a genre that

experienced its heyday during the Hollywood studio system of the 1930s and '40s and

has taken on a new lease of life in the 21st century. Carolyn Anderson and Jonathan

Lupo are quick to point out that although 2004 was labelled "The Year of the Biopic",

"genre production had been steady for years."[565] Their study, which compared a

sample of sixty-one theatrically released biopics produced in the United States

between 1990 and 2000 with a sample of more than two hundred biopics produced in

the US between 1929 and 1986,[566] located several generic trends, including the

association of particular directors with the genre, the perpetuation of white male

subjects, an emphasis on the lives of artists, and the use of the genre as a star vehicle.

Significantly, trends that showed an increase in their usage or application were an

emphasis on contemporary lives, the concentration on still-living subjects, low-budget

and independent productions, and the use of non-chronological narrative structures.

Anderson and Lupo summarise their study as demonstrating that "as our notions of

fame, celebrity, and greatness have undergone diffusion, debate, and revision, the

selection of who deserves—and ultimately receives—biographical treatment in

theatrical film has expanded, as have ways of telling life stories."[567] For example,

while the 2000s were marked by a series of successful biopics about famous musicians

such as Ray Charles (*Ray*, 2004), Cole Porter (*De-Lovely*, 2004) and Johnny Cash (*Walk*

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[565] Carolyn Anderson and Jonathan Lupo, 'Introduction to the special issue'. *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 36:2 (Summer 2008), p. 50.

[566] These studies are present in Carolyn Anderson, 'Biographical Film' in Gehring (ed.), *Handbook of Film Genres*, pp. 331-351; and in Carolyn Anderson and Jonathan Lupo, 'Hollywood Lives: The State of the Biopic at the Turn of the Century' in Steve Neale (ed.), *Genre and Contemporary Hollywood* (London: BFI, 2002), pp. 91-104.

[567] Anderson and Lupo, 'Introduction to the special issue', pp. 50-51.

the Line, 2005), 2010 was rife with cinematic profiles of less mainstream musicians, such as Ian Drury (*Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll*), Serge Gainsbourg (*Gainsbourg*), and Joan Jett and Cherie Currie (*The Runaways*). Since 2010, notable biopics have included *Carlos*, *The Fighter* (2010), *127 Hours*, *A Dangerous Method* (2011), *J. Edgar* (2011), *My Week with Marilyn* (2011), *Hitchcock* (2012), *The Iron Lady* (2012) and *Lincoln* (2012).

The Social Network, directed by David Fincher from a screenplay by Aaron Sorkin, is a biographical drama which deviates from both factual accounts of internet entrepreneur Mark Zuckerberg and the biopic tradition. The film concerns the founding of the social networking website Facebook by Zuckerberg (Jesse Eisenberg) and a group of young men at Harvard University in 2003-04. Having been dumped by his girlfriend Erica Albright (Rooney Mara), Zuckerberg is inspired to create a controversial on-campus website called Facemash which later—and with the financial backing of his close friend Eduardo Saverin (Andrew Garfield)—evolves into the ubiquitous online social networking platform. However, the success of Facebook occurs after Zuckerberg had been approached by Cameron and Tyler Winklevoss (Armie Hammer and Josh Pence) and Divya Narendra (Max Minghella) to develop a Harvard dating website, and they decide to sue him for intellectual property infringement. The film presents the divergent narratives created by the legal depositions being held against Zuckerberg, the first filed by the Winklevoss twins and the second by Saverin, who later claims his Facebook shares were diluted once the company was incorporated.

The Social Network is particularly relevant to this study of historical reassessment given that both Zuckerberg and his invention are such recent phenomena, and the extent to which its particular biographical approach can be seen to be influenced by other less conventional biopics, most notably *Citizen Kane* (1941). It seems almost paradoxical to make a film about a person's life when they are still so young (Zuckerberg was only 26 at the time of the film's release). Indeed, while the creation of such a hugely successful and impactful website has revolutionised modern social interaction, the full repercussions of his invention have yet to be fully comprehended and may even be immeasurable.[568] In comparison to the inventors, creators or scientists who developed life-saving and life-changing products, or artists and writers who left a legacy of works and influences, Zuckerberg may seem unworthy of similar biographical treatment, supported by the fact that the notoriety of his wealth greatly outweighs his public presence.

My study of the history of the biopic in Hollywood cinema largely refers to the two comprehensive pieces of literature on the topic, George F. Custen's *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History* and Dennis Bingham's *Whose Lives Are They Anyway? The Biopic As Contemporary Film Genre*. Custen's work is useful in considering the development of the genre during the studio era and the establishment of generic tropes, archetypes, and narrative devices. Custen defines the biographical

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[568] To emphasise Zuckerberg's impact on contemporary culture and communication, in October 2010 he was named as the "most influential people of the Information Age" by *Vanity Fair* (Alan Deutschman, Peter Newcomb, Richard Siklos, Duff McDonald and Jessica Flint, 'The Vanity Fair 100', *Vanity Fair* [Online], October 2010. Available at: http://www.vanityfair.com/business/features/2010/10/the-vf-100-201010?currentPage=1, accessed 29/10/13.

film as "one that depicts the life of a historical person, past or present,"[569] and sees its basis in the earliest forms of literature. This chapter aims to explore how *The Social Network* fits into the modern biopic cycle and to what extent the film has shaped audiences' notions of its protagonists. How are these characters different from those usually constructed in the biopic? How much actual truth is required in the modern biopic, and how has the "Hollywood view of history" been reintegrated through less conventional views of fame?

The first section of this chapter examines the visual style of *The Social Network* and the creation of what I call an "internet aesthetic" through the use of digital cinematography and various other visual and aural strategies. This is further related to the film's thematic principles concerning modern relationships and communication. The second part of the chapter deals with issues of genre, considering how the film intersects with the biopic's kaleidoscope of conventions and archetypes, as well as the narrative trajectories present in the genre. Custen's work is particularly relevant in considering the formal elements of the genre, such as opening/closing statements, the Great Man archetype,[570] narrative trajectories, and the function of family as supporting or oppositional figures. In a similar fashion to the comparative analysis in the previous chapter, I intend to use an earlier text to complement my study of a central case study, and *Citizen Kane* is used here to elucidate discourses surrounding

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[569] George F. Custen, *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), p. 5.

[570] Custen's conception of the "Great Man" is influenced by the Great Man theory popularised by Scottish writer Thomas Carlyle in the 1840s, a theory that claimed that history could largely be explained by the impact of such influential and powerful individuals as Muhammad, William Shakespeare, and Napoleon Bonaparte. Freud's admission that he needed strong enemies as much as he needed friends is reflected in the manner in which the early founders of Hollywood decided to "populate the narratives of their own lives with strong enemies in the movie community as well as filling their tales with close friends" (Custen, *Bio/Pics*, p. 151).

the "unconventional" biopic, as it shares several narrative and representational strategies with *The Social Network*. Bingham's work is more valuable for examining modern biopics whose success has displayed a "change in attitude" towards the biopic as a genre. There are several contemporary examples that demonstrate this change, such as *Man on the Moon* (1999), *The Aviator* (2004) and *American Splendor* (2003), and are useful for contextualising my arguments about *The Social Network*. When looking at the complex dialectic between film and history it is impossible to ignore debates over historical accuracy and verisimilitude, but this must be examined in the context of the biopic and in light of this chapter's case study. The fourth and final section studies the importance of the public-private dynamic in both *Citizen Kane* and *The Social Network*, developed through the key narrative device of wealth and fortune. These elements are examined in relation to concepts of the success story and the American Dream to consider dialectics of success and failure. I conclude by considering how *The Social Network* relates to concepts of technological nostalgia and contemporary fascinations with capturing and remembering the past. This forms a comprehensive framing of the modern biographical subject, and demonstrates how filmmakers and viewers are able to engage with very recent history.

"Now we're going to live on the internet":
technology, temporality, and the internet aesthetic

This thesis has examined several historical films that were shot digitally, most notably *Che* and *Public Enemies*, and together with a range of other digital biopics produced over the last few years, a structure of four particular aesthetic approaches can be identified: the temporal period covered by the narrative, and the particular style of digital filmmaking employed (i.e. the technological and aesthetic decisions made by

the filmmakers). From this a distinction can be made between those films that deal with the *distant past* and those that deal with more contemporary events of the *recent past*. Secondly, it is possible to distinguish between the employment of a style of *documentary realism* that provides an engaged perspective of subjectivity, and a more formal, *classical film style* that is more impersonal in its distancing of the biographical subject. This delineation therefore allows for an examination of the stylistic intentions and effects produced by the approaches categorised in the table below, which includes several additional examples.

	Distant past	Recent past
Classical film style (impersonal)	*Zodiac* (2007) – 1969-1991 *Che: Part One* (2008) – 1955-1964 *Hitchcock* (2012) – 1959 -1960 *Lawless* (2012) – 1931-1940	*The Social Network* (2010) – 2003-2006 *The Bling Ring* (2013) – 2008-2009[571] *Jobs* (2013) – 1971-2000
Documentary realism (subjective)	*Che: Part Two* (2008) – 1966-1967 *Public Enemies* (2009) – 1933-1934	*127 Hours* (2010) – 2003 *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012) – 2001-2012

However, while it is important to acknowledge the fact that these films fit into other generic frameworks (the gangster film, the war film, etc.), this selection of films does fit into Robert Rosenstone's categorisation of "the serious biofilm," which he defines as films "in which the director has either worked closely with a historical consultant and/or adhered faithfully to events as recounted in one or more written biographies, and in doing so has indulged in a minimal amount of invention with regard to characters and events."[572] So, while all these films are biographical, not all are

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[571] While there is not sufficient space to discuss *The Bling Ring* in this chapter, it operates alongside *The Social Network* for several reasons, most notably in expressing a fascination with contemporary celebrity culture and the generational adoption of social networking platforms as a means of communication and expression.
[572] Robert Rosenstone, 'In praise of the biopic' in Richard Francaviglia and Jerry Rodnitzky (eds.), *Lights, Camera, History: Portraying the Past in Film* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), pp. 15-

considered to be biopics, and it is debatable where the most prominent generic emphasis is situated in several cases. These films represent important interpretations of a life, and demonstrate the expressive potential of the digital as a biographical tool.

Pierre Sorlin states that "films represent socially produced images, offering in their own terms fictional answers to urgent questions raised by a situation,"[573] while David Ellwood asserts that films similar in theme or plot can "demonstrate totally different choices in cinematic styles: staging, lighting, locations, costumes, rhythms, visual and spoken languages, sound-tracks and all the rest."[574] These points are integral when considering how the biographical film employs various styles for particular aesthetic and narrative purposes. As I discuss in this section of the chapter, *Citizen Kane*'s basis in radio, newsreel and print aesthetics and the online visual sensibilities of *The Social Network* reflect the subject matter of each individual film while also speaking to their generational zeitgeists. These representational strategies support the notion that films are forms of cultural expression from which a multiplicity of meanings can be extracted. Facebook itself, as a sociocultural phenomenon, has had a major impact on contemporary society and communication. As the most ubiquitous of the social networking sites, it has become part of everyday life for millions of people within a global community.[575]

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16. In considering the role of biography within a larger historical framework, Rosenstone further states: "To do biography is to make the case that individuals are either at the centre of the historical process – or are worth studying as exemplars of lives, actions, and individual value systems we either admire or dislike" (Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, p. 90).

[573] David Ellwood (ed.), Introduction to *The Movies As History: Visions of the Twentieth Century* (Stroud: Sutton, 2000), p. 2.

[574] Ibid., p. 3.

[575] In order to provide a brief contextual background for Facebook and its impact on contemporary culture and communication, the social media platform was launched on 4th February 2004. As a way of levelling the playing field of social interaction, each user has one page and can fill in as many details of their life that they are comfortable with. Facebook relationships are made up of friends and followers.

The ontological features and disparities between film and digital have been explored in previous chapters, but changes in formats and technological developments are driven by the desire for new forms of expression; as Jean-Luc Godard states, "The so-called 'digital' is not a mere technical medium, but a medium of thought.[576] With this in mind, BFI programme director Heather Stewart cites *Russian Ark* (2002) and *Collateral* as films that demonstrate digital's enabling of extreme long takes and its ability to more realistically depict night-time environments. In the case of *The Social Network*, she states that Fincher and director of photography Jeff Cronenweth "created a claustrophobic world of low-lit interiors and shallow depth of focus, expressive of characters at ease with computers, not people,"[577] a realisation of a modern, digital world in which the thematic principles of miscommunication, social incompetence, mistrust and betrayal are intertwined with the film's aesthetic approach. Part of the significance of *The Social Network* in its approach to the past and its biographical subject relates to the way technology is used to reflect temporality.[578]

Users can give their opinions in a highly apathetic fashion by clicking on the "Like" button, and every activity, thought, or change of mood can be announced to the world. Facebook has become the most ubiquitous of these social networking sites, having become part of everyday life for millions of people to the same extent as radio, television, and email have been milestones in communication and media. Facebook has also become a metaphor for communication, friendship, and loneliness: Scott Foundas states, "A scant seven years into its existence, Facebook is already an inevitability, a cultural axiom" ('Revenge of the Nerd', *Film Comment* 46:5, September/October 2010, p. 38).

[576] Steven Spielberg, Keanu Reeves, Dick Pope, Mitch Epstein, Jean-Luc Godard, Heather Stewart, Martin Scorsese, 'Steven Spielberg & Martin Scorsese: the joy of celluloid', *The Guardian* [Online], 10 October 2011. Available at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2011/oct/10/steven-spielberg-martin-scorsese-celluloid, accessed 29/10/13

[577] Ibid.

[578] Although there have been several films that previously dealt with the internet and issues surrounding it, such as *Hackers* (1995), *The Net* (1995),and *The Matrix* series (1999-2003), several texts emerged in 2010 that have established the centrality of the internet in contemporary global culture. As well as *The Social Network*, the year saw the release of *Easy A*, *Middle Men*, and the documentary *Catfish*. These films expressed new modes of communication, interaction, commerce and the dissemination of information brought about by the internet, as well as thematic emphases on miscommunication, loneliness and isolation.

A range of characteristics here contribute to what I describe as an "internet aesthetic" in terms of recognising and replicating the presentational style and experience of online browsing, and the use of digital cinematography is central to this, together with its formal, symmetrical shot compositions and its use of colour and tone. The employment of high definition Red One digital cameras[579] allows for a level of stylistic distinction from the other digital films, such as the recent work of Michael Mann or Danny Boyle discussed earlier, in that the camera is utilised to evoke a more classical film style. The high resolution cameras give the film less of a grainy or blurry quality than less sensitive digital camera systems, particularly in motion, with far greater clarity and consistency. Moreover, motion is minimised altogether, eschewing the flexibility and mobility offered by lightweight digital cameras by using simple tracking shots, slow pans or static camera positioning rather than incorporating handheld camerawork or fast-motion zooms and pans. In this way the film conforms to more classical camera practices that create fluid movement, and places greater emphasis on editing and montage to create momentum. There is a rich, immaculate quality to the image that marks it as something other than celluloid but not recognisably "digital," given the potential of digital imagery to create spectatorial dissonance by placing the viewer *between* the spaces of reality and unreality where the image is neither like real life nor appears as it would if presented on film.[580]

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[579] Perhaps not coincidentally, Fincher borrowed these cameras from friend and fellow director Steven Soderbergh, albeit modified with the new Mysterium-X 4K sensor. Data was recorded on 16GB CF cards. See Michael Goldman, 'With Friends Like These…', *American Cinematographer* 91:10 [Online], October 2010. Available at: http://www.theasc.com/ac_magazine/October2010/TheSocialNetwork/page1.php, accessed 29/10/13

[580] The genealogy of this work can be traced to avant-garde digital films, most notably the Dogme movement and its manifesto which signified an engagement with new production practices and provoked visual discord in questioning the relationship between representation and reality. There is also a correlation—but also an important distinction—between the artificiality of CGI on screen, (particularly when special effects were at a less advanced stage) and the falseness that some spectators experience when viewing a film that is shot on digital rather than celluloid. Moreover, this richness may

Fincher's preference for digital cinematography was developed in both *Zodiac* (2007) and *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (2008), and has continued to use Red digital cameras for both *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011) and the Netflix series *House of Cards* (2013—).[581] As stated previously, the use of particular digital cameras has become a matter of aesthetic preference, and digital holds its own advantages and stylistic potentials for different filmmakers.[582] As noted in the previous chapter, a film such as Michael Mann's *Public Enemies* pushes for a deep level of immersion within its period diegesis, placing greater emphasis on immediacy and hyperrealism in its aesthetic. Its digital production creates a tension between the modern storytelling tools and the historical distance of the narrative, but the combination of this form of digital film style with a more recent biographical figure is less problematic. For instance, Danny Boyle's *127 Hours*, a biographical survival drama based on the events of adventurer Aron Ralston (James Franco) who became trapped in a canyon in Utah for several days,[583] demonstrates a more conventional marriage of form and content,

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derive from the fact that many scenes in *The Social Network*, as with much of Fincher's work, take place in low-light situations, and therefore contrast and definition become more central to its visual design.

[581] Fincher used the Thomson VIPER FilmStream camera on both *Zodiac* and *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*. He used the Red One MX together with the more sophisticated and dynamic update, the Red Epic camera on *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, before exclusively using the Epic on *House of Cards*.

[582] For Fincher, working with digital cameras has enabled him to immediately view footage in full resolution, experience less equipment failure (thus eliminating film negative damage, etc.) and reduce costs in post-production by using inexpensive desktop software such as Final Cut Pro.

[583] The film can also be seen as a dramatic reconstruction as it was based on Ralston's personal documentation of events, similar to the re-enactment of the climbing sequences in the documentary *Touching the Void* (2003).

with small, lightweight Canon EOS camera systems[584] utilised to capture the vibrancy and kinaesthesia of Ralston's activities.[585]

The Social Network also displays a much shallower depth of field than most digital films, given the ability of digital cameras to extend focal lengths to far greater extremes, thereby adopting elements from both the soft and hard styles of cinematography of the classical paradigm described by David Bordwell: the shallow depth of field and use of filters from the soft style and the sharp focus, high resolution qualities of the hard style that are inherent to digital cinematography.[586] The prevalence of shallow-focus medium shots maintains spectatorial focus on particular areas of the frame, often on a particular actor's face (see Figures 3.1 and 3.2) in the verbose exchanges between characters that pattern the film. The steady, fluid nature of the camerawork makes it less intrusive than handheld cinematography, and the film opts for crispness and clarity over frantic motion and unfocused imagery.[587] This pertinently lends itself to create the smooth digital sheen that exemplifies the film's internet aesthetic, but this shallow depth of field also creates a certain flatness concerning image composition that is once again analogous to the computer screen;

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[584] These single-lens reflex cameras with HD video functionality have become an affordable alternative to digital cinema cameras. Boyle used the 1D, 5D and 7D series, which are all flexible enough to be operational with a range of cinematographic equipment.

[585] For example, a particularly vertiginous shot follows Ralston and a pair of hikers he met on his trail (Kate Mara and Amber Tamblyn) as dive into a hidden underground pool. While the film seems to involve the spectator in his perilous activities in this manner, the agency is further adopted by Ralston as he films himself partaking in them—such as when he straps the video camera to the handlebars of his bike—thus presenting the personal gratification he takes from challenging and exerting himself.

[586] See David Bordwell, 'Deep-focus cinematography' (pp. 341-352), and Kristin Thompson, 'Major technological changes of the 1920s' (p. 287) in Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*.

[587] Director of cinematography Jeff Cronenweth has noted the challenges of manipulating depth-of-field with digital cameras, lenses, and filters; he says, "If filmmakers shooting digitally choose to use depth-of-field as a storytelling tool, then it's imperative to control the exposure to control focus" (quoted in Goldman, 'With Friends Like These…'). While this level of control has always been necessary in cinematography, these effects are optically produced in a different way, and digital cameras have the potential to extend depth-of-field to far greater extremes.

no matter how dynamic the content that internet users encounter may be, it is ultimately viewed on a flat display with definitive, non-transgressable margins.

The subliminal nature of digital grading can also be pinpointed in *The Social Network*, in which a narrative arc is created in the lighting during the Digital Intermediate phase.[588] The film's lighting changes as the story develops, transitioning from the dark, warm interiors of Harvard to the brighter, burnished tones of California and the Facebook offices in Palo Alto, paralleling Zuckerberg's success as well as Saverin's increasing disillusionment. Distinct colour palettes for the film's central locations allow each scene's locality to be identified and distinguished from each other within the non-linear narrative (Figures 3.3-3.6). This feature is consistent with online visual representation as websites are branded and coded in specific colour terms to create distinctness and trigger brand recognition.[589] The symmetry and emphasis on even composition further evokes a visual display with which internet users may be familiar, indicating a convergence of classical and modern filmmaking styles.[590] The film is thus divided into manageable, identifiable sections over the course of its non-linear narrative, with shot compositions emphasising the fact that characters are frequently

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[588] This is similar to the colour arc controlled in the DI that Stephen Prince identifies in *The Duchess* (2008). See Prince, *Digital Visual Effects in Cinema*, p. 77.

[589] Also of relevance here is the way in which *The Social Network* presents the spectator with a series of digitised spaces. The film's digital production and postproduction are key to creating an aesthetic that reflects its subject matter, conveying the manner by which the internet has created a digital world of its own. For instance, the Henley-on-Thames boat race sequence confirms and reasserts the hypothesis that widespread digitisation has become inescapable through both its kineticised, hyperreal rendering (with processes of miniature faking, tilt-shift cinematography which encourages selective focus, and a digitised version of Edvard Grieg's "In the Hall of the Mountain King") and how it sets up Facebook's expanding popularity and influence around the world as the head of the Winklevosses' host family, Mr. Kenwright (Oliver Muirhead), mentions that his daughter had watched the race on Facebook.

[590] Peter Rosenfeld, operator of the "A" camera on the film, saw Fincher's goal as straightforward photography in real-world light, stating: "He likes symmetry – balanced compositions, strong lines, level frames, zero keystone effects. He favors [dolly] track and avoids cranes as much as possible. I believe there is only one handheld shot in the entire movie. David was so clear on what he wanted visually that camera placements and focal-length choices were easy to make" (quoted in Goldman, 'With Friends Like These…').

surrounded by a great deal of extraneous information: Kent Jones notes that "every scene is about zeroing in, focusing, cutting out the noise and distraction of other people and differing viewpoints."[591] This is emphasised by sharp changes of focus, such as the moment at the end of the film where Saverin spots Zuckerberg in the Facebook offices shortly before confronting him (Figures 3.7 and 3.8). These features underscore the solipsistic, self-affirming position that the internet allows for attention to be focused solely on the information that interests the user.

The opening scene of the film in which Albright breaks up with Zuckerberg serves as an expedient example for considering these traits. It sees the two figures positioned in the centre of the bar (see Figure 3.9). The scene begins with a wide shot (Figure 3.10) before moving in for over-the-shoulder medium shots of the characters (Figure 3.11) as they engage in a conversation that involves frequently overlapping dialogue.[592] This is complemented by the sound design: first, the White Stripes song 'Ball and Biscuit' begins playing during the studio logo, becoming a diegetic presence as we open on the scene on the bar; second, during this sequence the background noise level rises, combining with the music track to provide the general ambience and immediate sense of being present in a bar; third, as the characters begin conversing, the noise levels of the music and general hubbub within the public space are comparatively high, forcing the audience to focus harder on their spirited, fast-paced badinage. By introducing the characters in a setting filled with a range of audial and visual distractions, the scene

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[591] Kent Jones, 'Only Connect'. *Sight & Sound* 20:11 (November 2010), pp. 34-36.

[592] As Mehruss Jon Ahi and Armen Karaoghlanian note, many shots in this scene were constructed from split screen and performances from different takes that were composited together in postproduction to create a more refined image. Mehruss Jon Ahi and Armen Karaoghlanian, 'INTERIORS: David Fincher', *Arch Daily* [Online], 03 June 2013. Available at: http://www.archdaily.com/380775/interiors-david-fincher/, accessed 29/10/13

both draws in and engages the viewer and sets the tone for smart, breathless exchanges for the rest of the film.[593] In particular, the scene emphasises how Zuckerberg is set at a pronounced remove from those around him (further accentuated by Albright breaking up with him), and the initial establishment of his feelings of disconnection and isolation through the manipulation of sound and space become central to the emotional impetus behind the creation of Facebook.

The idea of the digital workflow—from preproduction storyboards to image capture to colour correction to editing and, finally, digital distribution and exhibition—has been realised in the last decade to become an efficient and cost-effective practice. Regarding the totalising influence of these digital processes (what Fincher labels "righteous workflow"[594]), Stephen Prince notes that digital compositing, digital film scanning and printing, and the digital intermediate "have altered production methods and professional relationships, have changed cinematography to an image capture process, have made it more like painting, and have greatly enlarged the expressive capabilities of film artists."[595] In contrast to the work of Michael Mann examined in the previous chapter (*Collateral*, *Miami Vice*, *Public Enemies*), which features deeper

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[593] Editor Angus Wall has commented that editing the scene took 3 weeks, but that it was central to establishing a sense of authenticity (ibid.). The overwhelming nature of this scene is mirrored by one later in the film set in an exclusive San Francisco nightclub.

[594] Goldman, 'With Friends Like These…" In an influential article on digital workflow, Ignatiy Vishnevetsky examines how digital technology has affected directors such as David Fincher and Steven Soderbergh in their approaches. He believes the key idea is that of "error correction," from fine-tuning cuts and re-framing shots to altering exposures and recoloring the image. In the cases of Fincher and Soderbergh, this has given rise to precise processes such as "strategic reshooting" (having reviewed rough cuts during the filming of *Side Effects* [2013] rather than disconnected dailies) and total shot revision (on *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, Fincher shot in 5K with a 2:1 aspect ratio but finished in 4K with a 2.4:1 ratio, meaning that each shot could be reframed and reworked without affecting image quality). These examples demonstrate how digital workflow can be seen as a tool of expression and authorship, but Vishnevetsky also notes that the films' mise-en-scène or narrative structures haven't changed: "What *has* changed is the notion of environment and intent." See Ignatiy Vishnevetsky, 'What Is the 21st Century?: Revising the Dictionary', *Notebook* [Online], 01 February 2013. Available at: http://mubi.com/notebook/posts/what-is-the-21st-century-revising-the-dictionary, accessed 29/10/13

[595] Prince, *Digital Visual Effects in Cinema*, p. 78.

blacks and blown-out areas which are strongly aligned with the surrealism of digital video, the recent films of David Fincher (*Zodiac*, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, *The Social Network*, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*) offer crisper, luminous imagery, dominated by more saturated colours.[596] Like Soderbergh, Fincher has frequently returned to using Red cameras which offer a greater resolution than its contemporaries;[597] referencing *Che* and *The Social Network*, Prince notes their filmlike appearances, "a product of the camera's ability to handle tones, shadows, and highlights with impressive dynamic range."[598] In contrast to Mann's films, noise is "less excessive and more closely resembles film grain,"[599] leading Prince to conclude that it is becoming harder to differentiate between film and video as the disparities of resolution and exposure have narrowed exponentially.[600]

Prince points to Fincher's earlier film *Zodiac*, a mystery thriller about the search for the real-life "Zodiac" serial killer in San Francisco over a period from the late 1960s to the early '90s, as "a historically important film because it places digital effects in the service of banality rather than spectacle."[601] As with the procedural nature of that

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[596] A key change deriving from digital production concerns the relative aperture (also known as focal ratio or f-stop) of digital optical systems, as HD video offers a much narrower range than film. Whereas a cinematographer that uses film relies on light meters to calculate exposure—making them "a kind of alchemist," according to Prince—those shooting digitally either consult a waveform monitor that displays the amplitude of the video signal or view the scene displayed as a video image (ibid., p. 82). This issue of narrow focal ratios has been addressed in the development of more dynamic and responsive digital cameras, such as the Arri Alexa and the Red Epic, but the way in which digital aesthetics have been employed over this period of the technological transition can be evidenced in contrasting the recent films of these two filmmakers.

[597] The Red One captures images in RAW format at 4K resolution (4096 x 3072 pixels compared to HD's 1920 x 1080), and Prince describes this as "an extra- or ultra-high definition format" (ibid., p. 84). The newest versions of the Red Epic and Red Scarlet can record at a 5K resolution (5120 x 2700), while Aaton, Dalsa, Sony, and Vision Research have developed 4K digital cameras.

[598] Ibid.

[599] Ibid.

[600] In the case of *Che*, Prince notes that the main giveaway of its digital origins is "its hyper-sharp clarity of detail and an occasional harshness in the highlights" (ibid).

[601] Ibid.

film, *The Social Network* also emphasises naturalism and authenticity in the service of the biopic. Camera movements and lighting are typically not overly elaborate or stylised, placing emphasis on the dialogue and character interactions. It also features digital composites that recreate computer software of the recent past, illustrating the tension between technological progress and historical reflection by accurately depicting the origins of technological change.[602] As with *Zodiac*, "a viewer can watch the movie and never suspect how extensively its locations and visual designs are digitally engineered."[603] However, while *The Social Network* is a less effects-intensive film, its internet aesthetic is stylised to conform to the film's subject matter and context.[604] The creation of a subtle aesthetic tension between realist and synthetic qualities—in contrast to the overtness of artificial expression in *Public Enemies*—imbues visible surfaces with a uniquely detailed and textural quality. Prince notes that, in *Zodiac*, Fincher "uses the remarkable detailing of HD as a metaphor for the search for truth and understanding," and the film's clarity "seems to promise answers, and yet none are forthcoming."[605] There is a similar epistemological desire to know truth in *The Social Network*, but the films diverge in their digital designs as well as their

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[602] During production, the actors only pantomimed with blue screens, and the screen images (such as a Network Solutions page registering the domain "thefacebook.com") were added digitally in post-production. In the film's audio commentary, Fincher states that web technology consultant Paul McReynolds ensured the program versions were true to the time depicted in the movie.

[603] Prince, *Digital Visual Effects in Cinema*, p. 85. Additionally, while Lisa Purse believes the use of digital effects were able to generate historically accurate locations, she believes its digital imaging "also works for the aesthetic systems of the film, its browns and yellows in keeping with *Zodiac*'s palette of yellows, greens and browns," evocative of the historical period and 1970s photography. See Purse, *Digital Imaging in Popular Cinema*, p. 15.

[604] Supporting the notion of Fincher as a technically-minded director, Mark Browning describes him as "fascinated by the machinery of filmmaking." See Mark Browning, *David Fincher: Films That Scar* (Santa Barbara, CA: Prager, 2010), p. 144. Fincher's attention to detail and employment of a diverse range of technologies and practices, such as subtle CGI (see Prince, pp. 84-87 and 136-144) and shooting a large number of takes (the first scene of *The Social Network*, for instance, required around 100 takes) has led to him being viewed as uncompromising perfectionist. Likening Fincher to Orson Welles' famous quote about making *Citizen Kane*, Browning notes: "There is the feel of a man playing with a giant technological train set, in which it is the means, the technology, and the *control* of this, that is striking" (Browning, p. 153).

[605] Prince, *Digital Visual Effects in Cinema*, p. 86.

period settings. The high definition focus of *The Social Network* can be equated with the narrative trajectories of Zuckerberg, Saverin and Parker, with the density and clarity of the film's imagery metaphorically contrasting with the opacity and inconclusiveness of the film in detailing the relationships between these three characters and the questioning of who was responsible for the founding of Facebook and for what reasons. Its style appears to point towards presenting a definitive, truthful account of a great American inventor, but this is undermined by its changing perspectives and refusal to provide a cathartic verdict on either the man or his invention.

However, the film does not resort to any stylistic gimmicks that the subject matter would seem to invite, such as treading into the territory of going "inside" the internet in visual terms as in *Hackers*, *Johnny Mnemonic* (1995) and *The Matrix* (1999), for instance. In fact, the Facebook website itself is glimpsed only fleetingly throughout the film.[606] Zuckerberg and his collaborators take pleasure in the perfectionism of programming, and the actual creation and development of the site is conveyed through a series of montages consisting of programmers writing code while in a state of extreme concentration and audiovisual seclusion over a number of consecutive hours. In an early scene, the film indulges in visual representations of internet content during Zuckerberg's early indiscretions regarding the creation of Facemash, an on-campus website that allows users to compare and rate images of female students. Zuckerberg blogs about the process of creating the site as well as his previous encounter with Albright that evening, thus providing voiceover narration for these

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[606] There is the possibility that this could also be attributed to issues of intellectual property rights regarding the explicit use of the Facebook site, though the company's logo and branding are particularly evident at the end of the film during the scene that is set in the offices of Facebook.

events in an alcohol-enhanced montage of image collection, code writing and blogging, a frantic and exhausting sequence set to a pounding electronic score.[607] The sequence is enhanced by brief shots of the computer's keyboard, mouse and the screen itself (Figures 3.12 and 3.13), demonstrating the internet in action and effect, and is counterposed against the more seductive imagery of a boisterous party held by the prestigious Phoenix Club (Figures 3.14 and 3.15).

The act of programming is difficult to convey on screen in a manner that is both cinematic and comprehensible to the spectator; it is more problematic as a form of creative expression—textual code being rapidly typed on a computer screen—than articulations of art or music in the biopic. Even though users may get pleasure from the websites and applications that programming creates, the visualisation of programming is far less dynamic and artistic than, say, Jackson Pollock (Ed Harris) painting on a canvas in *Pollock* (2000) or Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (Tom Hulce) composing an opera in *Amadeus* (1984). Fincher attempts to depict the intensity of programming, the mind-set that one must occupy in order to work for several hours straight: "He's wired in," people exclaim so that others do not disturb the person sitting at a laptop, eyes transfixed on the screen, fingers in constant motion. But programming can also be seen to be an exciting and enjoyable activity, exemplified in the "vodka-shots-and-programming" party in Zuckerberg's dorm room that pits several coders against each other in competition, a scene that, for Zadie Smith, provides "some clue of the pleasures" of programming.[608]

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[607] The track playing in this sequence is 'In Motion' by Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross.
[608] Zadie Smith, 'Generation Why'. *The New York Review of Books* [Online], 25 November 2010. Available at: http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2010/nov/25/generation-why/?pagination=false, accessed 11/07/11. It is worth noting that Zuckerberg, once again, does not

Justin Chang, writing in *Variety*, sees the infrequent presentations of the Facebook site as "a decision consistent with the film's suspicious attitude toward the whole enterprise,"[609] with regards to Sorkin and Fincher's lack of familiarity with the site and the amount of emphasis they wish to place on the social networking platform itself. The creation of Facebook, however, is not presented in the same way as that of Facemash; it is more thought-out and less of a frenzied, rushed process, and thus we do not see its conception and construction through the same montage and screen-based techniques. Instead, it is mapped out more carefully—in part due to the size of the project, the number of people involved, and the graduated stages of development—starting with its registration (Figure 3.16) and the actual site itself is first shown to Saverin (and the spectator) when in a finished state (Figure 3.17). Its creation is presented as a series of crucial breakthroughs, including Zuckerberg's Eureka moment of including a "relationship status" on user profiles, both a generic convention and an act of pastiche which thereby reflects the narrative trajectory of the biopic of invention. Of course, for audiences part of the pleasure of watching a biopic about a famous innovation (such as *The Story of Louis Pasteur* [1936] and *Edison, the Man* [1940]) is relating it to its status in actuality and the knowledge that it is authentic; the moment of conception becomes more vital when related to the impact that Facebook has had on contemporary forms of social interaction. This progression demonstrates two sides of the internet aesthetic on display: the quick, organic creation of easily digestible content and the more carefully developed, multi-faceted approach to higher quality, longer lasting and more satisfying online material.

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allow himself to be drawn into the party atmosphere, and there is an element of problem solving in the dramatization of this scene that is uncharacteristic of the rest of the film.

[609] Justin Chang, 'Speedy "network" connection' in *Variety* 420:7 (27 September 2010), pp. 23, 32.

Several commenters have noted the influence of screwball comedy on the dialogue and/or thematic principles of both *Citizen Kane* and *The Social Network*,[610] but perhaps this link can connote greater meaning in terms of *The Social Network*'s internet aesthetic. While I feel the verbal style greatly differs from screwball dialogue in terms of delivery and intonation, this pacing of dialogue—as well as its literal construction— is significant as a reflection of online formal expression. Regarding *The Social Network*'s cold opening, Henry K. Miller describes the heated exchange between Zuckerberg and Albright as "vintage Aaron Sorkin dialogue, chess at tennis speed, and played faultlessly, yet there's something wrong or unfamiliar. One can talk fast and remain inarticulate, and Zuckerberg's conversation is all over the place, self-important, ungenerous, pedantic – a born blogger, in short."[611] This is not the same witty repartee of the screwball comedy as, in *The Social Network*, there is always a victim of this verbalised wit: the recipient takes the comment on the chin and may take offense instead of returning with a line of equivalent or superior sharpness. In the opening scene it is evident that Albright is offended by Zuckerberg's opinion that she doesn't need to study because she attends Boston University and not Harvard, and Zuckerberg is taken aback by her advice that "you're going to go through life thinking that girls don't like you because you're a nerd. And I want you to know, from the bottom of my heart, that that won't be true. It'll be because you're an asshole." In this conversation

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[610] For *Citizen Kane* see Pauline Kael, 'Raising Kane' in *Raising Kane and Other Essays* (London & New York: Marion Boyars, 1996) and Morris Dickstein, 'The Last Film of the 1930s; or, Nothing Fails like Success' in Gottesman (ed.), *Perspectives on Citizen Kane*, p. 84. For *The Social Network* see Mark Harris, 'Inventing Facebook', *New York Magazine* [Online], 17 September 2010 (available at: http://nymag.com/movies/features/68319/, accessed 29/10/13) and Roger Ebert, 'The Social Network', *Chicago Sun Times* [Online], 29 September 2010 (available at: http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-social-network-2010, accessed 29/10/13).
[611] Henry K. Miller, '*The Social Network*'. *Sight & Sound* 20:11, (November 2010), p. 75.

comments are not simply dismissed, nor are they outdone by wittier or more eloquent ripostes; this is an argument in which words have consequences.

Furthering the view that Zuckerberg's speech style mirrors the text of a blogger, Kent Jones notes:

> He seems to be thinking in the stop/go rhythm of internet searches and hacking jags, divulging information in increments with no regard to the flow of conversation. Like the regular denizens of the blog world, he is on the lookout for slights and ready to shift into full-blooded resentment at any moment, doubling back to interpret the alleged subtext of a remark from 30 seconds ago as if it were brand new.[612]

Not only does this elucidate the effect his internet lifestyle has had on his social interactions in terms of his ability to enter into dialogue and form arguments, it also suggests that Zuckerberg's computer background has informed the way that he thinks—the way his mind works—through the manner in which he can review a conversation as if it were text by returning to an earlier point and addressing it separately. He is able to scan a whole dialogue in his mind, manipulating and interrogating it at his will; the conversation that opens the film has several examples of this. For instance, Zuckerberg ignores Albright's question, "Does that mean you actually got nothing wrong" by talking about final clubs before answering it several lines later, "Yes, it means I got nothing wrong on the test," but when she tries to return the conversation to an earlier juncture by asking about geniuses in China, he ignores the question, thus accentuating the awkward and exhausting nature of the conversation.

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[612] Jones, 'Only Connect'.

However, I agree with Miller's opinion that "[o]ne can talk fast and remain inarticulate," and Zuckerberg's speech does appear to be patterned by the swift dismissals, direct language, and off-hand opinions of blogspeak. This becomes typical of Zuckerberg's delivery throughout the film, using short, clipped sentences to convey the necessary content and absolute information seemingly unaware of its presentation or delivery. His words have a fascination with logic at the expense of tone and this is why he is both unable to read things emotionally and unaware of how he is distinguished from "normal" people. Though what he says seems comprehensible enough, no other character seems to speak in the same manner, and his monotone voice and interrogation (or correction) of others' language makes it that much harder for him to relate to others and others to him. Not only does this reflect a central quandary of modern communication in terms of the division between real-life social interactions and how people interact online, it also reveals another level of social commentary concerning how these forms of communication have affected our ability to relate to one other. Considering that the internet—and Facebook in particular—has the intention of bringing people together, making them "more connected," the film seems to suggest that these platforms have instead created greater divisions between different social groups and deepened the incompatibility of existing relationships. David Fincher makes reference to the paradox of this dynamic, stating: "There's an ironic story behind this thing that's about friendship and the need to connect. The fact that it was Facebook brought an interesting context for this simple drama of acrimony."[613] This is a particularly interesting phrase given that what is being dramatised here is the loss of friendship; the film depicts a generation that has formed

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[613] David Carr, 'A Zillion Friends, and a Few Enemies'. *New York Times* [Online], 17 September 2010. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/19/movies/19social.html, accessed 11/07/11.

internet relationships which operate under different conditions and within constantly mobile boundaries, a generation of over-sharers often unable of relating to real-life situations or social experiences.

"The way of the future…": *Citizen Kane* and *The Aviator*

Much has been written about Gregg Toland's pioneering and highly influential cinematography in *Citizen Kane*, with André Bazin focusing on crucial features such as the use of deep focus and the sequence shot, and Jerome Charyn pinpointing the effect of the camerawork on the mood and characterisations of the film.[614] Welles had a particular vision in mind for the film, with a clear conception of its obtrusive visual style that plays with how the spectator relates to on-screen space through the use of deep focus lenses, low angles, and complex shots that track through objects such as doors and windows.[615] The protagonist's basis on newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst is also significant in terms of the choice of biographical subject.[616] Smyth notes:

> scholars often use Hearst as merely historical shorthand to explore Welles's more fascinating examinations of American isolationism (Laura Mulvey) and the mythic hero (Morris Beja).[617] […] But within William Randolph Hearst's career as a journalist, within the trajectory of post Civil-War

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[614] André Bazin, 'The Evolution of the Language of Cinema' in *What Is Cinema?* Volume 1, pp. 33-40; Jerome Charyn, *Movieland: Hollywood and the Great American Dream Culture* (London & New York: New York University Press, 1996), pp. 44-47.

[615] Robert Wise's editing techniques can also to be considered to be conspicuous in terms of the swift presentation of images through montage, most notably in the famous 'News on the March' sequence.

[616] As biographer W.A. Swanberg wrote, "In truth, Hearst was not a newspaperman at all in the conventional sense. He was an inventor, a producer, and arranger. The news that actually happened was too dull for him, and besides it was also available to other papers. He lived in a childlike dream world, imagining wonderful stories and then going out and creating them, so that the line between fact and fancy was apt to be fuzzy" (Swanberg, *Citizen Hearst* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961], p. 60).

[617] Laura Mulvey, *Citizen Kane* (London: BFI Publishing, 1992); Morris Beja, '"A Really Great Man": Myth and Realism in *Citizen Kane'*, in Morris Beja (ed.), *Perspectives on Orson Welles* (New York: G.K. Hall, 1995), pp. 253-259.

history, within Mankiewicz's original script and Welles's film lie the essential conflicts between objective and subjective accounts of the past and the struggle against American decline.[618]

Indeed, the selection of Hearst as the subject of a major historical film violated many of the more recent formulas in screen biographies and established a series of organic components for Hollywood's next historical cycle. A brief examination of the influential aesthetics of *Citizen Kane* can help to elucidate how *The Social Network* uses style to reflect its own thematic content, and relate this to modern filmmaking practices and generic concepts.

Laura Mulvey writes that the style "in which Gregg Toland shot *Citizen Kane* also contains an implicit homage to the photographic style of the new photojournalism,"[619] a style rendered by crisper definition, greater depth, and the occasional use of high contrast: "There is a kind of poetic justice in Welles and Toland's use of deep focus in a film which attacks Hearst. The magnate of newspapers and old-style movies is depicted in a new-style cinematography pioneered by the newspapers' new rival, the photo-magazines."[620] This observation exemplifies an irony that is echoed in the internet aesthetic of *The Social Network*, given that the presentation of images and information in this form is particularly appropriate for a man whose fame and fortune can be attributed to his success in internet-based technologies and business practice. Kane's life and exploits are presented with a full range of contradictions and inconsistencies that are exemplified in the montage of newspaper headlines that report Kane's death, offering up a startling differences in their descriptions of him as

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[618] J.E. Smyth, *Reconstructing American Historical Cinema: From* Cimarron *to* Citizen Kane (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), p. 320.

[619] Mulvey, *Citizen Kane*, p. 37.

[620] Ibid.

both "a great American" and an "enemy of America"; this sequence also recognises the

factual discrepancies that arise between the newspaperman's own press (the headline

in Kane's *New York Daily Enquirer* reads "Entire Nation Mourns Great Publisher As

Outstanding American" [Figure 3.18]) and those run by others ("Stormy Career Ends

For 'U.S. Fascist No. 1'," states the *Chicago Globe*; "Editor Who Instigated 'War For

Profit' Is Beaten By Death" declares the *El Paso Journal* [Figure 3.19]).

Pauline Kael positions *Citizen Kane* at the end of the 1930s newspaper picture cycle, an

array of films including *The Front Page* (1931), *It Happened One Night* (1934), *Mr.

Deeds Goes to Town* (1936), *His Girl Friday* (1940) and *The Philadelphia Story* (1940)

that can be seen to influence *Kane*'s print-media visual style: "the toughest-minded,

the most satirical of the thirties pictures often featured newspaper setting, or, at least,

reporters."[621] There is a continuation of a journalistic aesthetic in the manner in which

information about Kane is presented via newsreels (Figure 3.20), a *March of Time*-style

presentation of sound and image that presents the spectator with a comprehensive

amount of data that summarises Kane's life and death. For audiences of this era this

formal presentation takes on a further significance, not only due to a general

familiarity with newsreels (and hence their style of presentation), but also because it is

likely that newsreels themselves would have been included as part of the exhibition of

the film.   In this way, the newsreel sequence extends this form of thematic

presentation with which spectators are accustomed. Unlike *Citizen Kane*'s newsreel

montage of the visual and the aural, *The Social Network* does not provide such a

comprehensive and digestible account of its protagonist's past, or in fact any

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[621] Kael, 'Raising Kane', p. 181.

backgrounding of the characters' histories or childhoods. The newsreel displays

certain Kane traits, such as his flamboyance, his profligacy, and his selfishness, but

these are heavily sensationalised and hyperbolised to the point where they form

headlines suitable for Kane/Hearst's yellow press.

Furthermore, Orson Welles' use of sound on *Citizen Kane* has been described as

creating a "radio aesthetic" by Rick Altman: in 'Deep-Focus Sound: *Citizen Kane* and

the Radio Aesthetic', Altman undertakes an examination of the radio sound style, its

diegetic motivation and discursive manipulation, the marriage of deep-focus

cinematography and deep-focus sound design, and other radio influences and

contributions to the narrative that were combined to create new aural textures.

Altman insists that description of sound in *Citizen Kane* "has been inaccurate in large

part because it has been selective and incomplete,"[622] but his in-depth study attempts

to encompass the use of sound throughout the film rather than in specific scenes. This

radio aesthetic is significant in that it complements the deep-focus photography,

though Altman believes the film "totally disregards standard practices regarding the

use of sound with deep-focus photography,"[623] which is why the film appears both

jarring and innovative. The film deviates from a sense of sound realism through a

patterning of "scale-matching slippage,"[624] but also achieves accurate spatial

perception through sound. As I have mentioned, sound does play an important role at

certain points of *The Social Network*, such as the opening scene in the college bar and

a later conversation that takes place between Zuckerberg and Parker in a nightclub,

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[622] Rick Altman, 'Deep-Focus Sound: *Citizen Kane* and the Radio Aesthetic' in Ronald Gottesman (ed.), *Perspectives on Citizen Kane* (New York: G.K. Hall & Co.; London: Prentice Hall International, 1996), p. 100.
[623] Ibid., p. 104.
[624] Ibid., p. 96.

but overall it does not play a large part in the aesthetic paradigm I have laid out which focuses on how the visuals and musical score contribute to the internet sensibilities and attributes of the film.

Having remarked on *Kane*'s newspaper and radio aesthetics, as well as *The Social Network*'s online/internet visual style, I wish to draw a further comparison to identify how films that deal with technology—and technological advancements in particular— diffuse their subject matter through specific aesthetic practices. *The Aviator* is another recent film that deals with a real-life pioneer and the progression of technology; the film's biographical subject, Howard Hughes (Leonardo DiCaprio), was an American business magnate, famous for inheriting a substantial family fortune and becoming (amongst many other things) a successful film producer and a pioneer in the field of aviation. His life was also marked by mental illness, suffering from severe obsessive-compulsive disorder, mysophobia, and bouts of depression, leading to a psychological and physical decline in his later years. The film centres on Hughes' life from the late 1920s until 1947 and the central narrative starts with production of *Hell's Angels* (1930), a film that combines the two relatively new technological practices of motion pictures and aviation. Through this period of his life he meets and socialises with many Hollywood stars such as Jean Harlow (Gwen Stefani), Errol Flynn (Jude Law), Ava Gardner (Kate Beckinsale), and Katherine Hepburn (Cate Blanchett), as well as producing other films, notably *Scarface* (1932) and *The Outlaw* (1943).

The Aviator is a fantastical visualisation of this period of film history, one that attempts to convey Hollywood's status as a dream factory complete with all the glitz, glamour

and romance of the classical studio era. Director Martin Scorsese wanted the aesthetic of the film to represent the state-of-the-art colour technology of the period in which Hughes was producing motion pictures (Figures. 3.21 and 3.22). For this reason, Lisa Purse views *The Aviator* as a "nostalgic return to cinema's celluloid history, most explicitly through homage,"[625] with digital imaging technology used to evoke the 1930s and '40s cinematography, lighting, and colour design. As John Pavlus notes, "The film boasts an ambitious fusion of period lighting techniques, extensive effects sequences and a digital re-creation of two extinct cinema color processes: two-color and three-strip Technicolor. […] Technicolor's handiwork graced many of the pictures Hollywood released during Hughes's mercurial career, and Scorsese wanted these unique color signatures to be part of *The Aviator*'s design."[626] Two Strip Technicolor was the only colour process available from 1927-1934,[627] and this effect was replicated with different colour filters and the adding of coloured dyes to the print. This created a "hand-painted look where faces appear normal and green takes on a blue-green quality while the sky and all things blue appear cyan,"[628] giving the film its "classical Hollywood" aesthetic. The post-1934 scenes replicated the 3 Strip Technicolor effect through digitally refiltering using a version of a primary colour matte. This multilayered matte strategy produced a generic "Technicolor Filter" that was then applied to every frame of the film based on the chronology and the desired Technicolor aesthetic. As well as the period Technicolor palette, cinematographer

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[625] Lisa Purse, *Digital Imaging in Popular Cinema*, p. 3. Purse also notes other films such as *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow* (2004), *King Kong* (2005), and *The Good German*.
[626] John Pavlus, 'High Life', *American Cinematographer* 86:1 [Online], January 2005. Available at: http://www.theasc.com/magazine/jan05/aviator/page1.html, accessed 29/10/13
[627] See 'Color Process' on 'The Aviator Visual Effects' [Online]. Available at: http://www.aviatorvfx.com/?cmd=frontendOverview&id=color, accessed 11/07/11.
[628] Ibid.

Robert Richardson also employed an array of film emulsions, cameras, and lenses, as well as shooting on six Kodak stocks.[629]

In *The Aviator*, Hughes becomes an increasingly isolated figure, racked by depression and paranoia; those around him often fail to see the scope of his vision and the technology itself struggles to keep up with his demands. One of Hughes' notable idiosyncrasies in this regard is his repetition of the phrase "the way of the future," indicative of his obsession with progress and evolution. His unusual relationship with film—and its effect on him—culminates towards the end of the film where he locks himself away in a private screening room, watching old reels of his own films or running films such as *Ice Station Zebra* (1968) on a continuous loop. According to Jerold J. Abrams, Hughes' love of film comes from a demand for both escape and protection: "He's in the cockpit of his own private theater, a safe god alone and away from people, where he can contemplate the images of reality from afar, considering their rearrangements in peace."[630] In these scenes of self-imposed isolation (Figures 3.23 and 3.24), the parallels between Hughes' fractured mind and film viewing come to the fore as the entire room—and even Hughes' body—becomes a system of screens. Abrams goes as far as describing Hughes as "crucified in his own white cinematic armchair, a film god with long hair and a beard, as white light explodes from the camera projector like a magnificent halo behind his head."[631] While he may be reading

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[629] Richardson worked in 3-perf Super 35mm (2.35:1) and used Panaflex Platinum cameras and Primo lenses. The Kodak stocks used were: Vision 500T 5279, Vision 320T 5277, Vision 200T 5274, Vision2 500T 5218, EXR 100T 5248 and EXR 200T 5293. Richardson also states that he and Scorsese considered re-creating the choreography of period-style camera moves as well as shooting the film in Academy ratio. Pavlus, 'High Life'.

[630] Jerold J. Abrams, 'The Cinema of Madness: Friedrich Nietzsche and the Films of Martin Scorsese' in Mark T. Conrad, *The Philosophy of Martin Scorsese* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), p. 88.

[631] Ibid., pp. 88-89.

too much into the messianic depiction of Hughes, the constantly shifting nature of the walls and the patterning of light on Hughes' figure frames his status as a man of technology: the cinema literally surrounds and becomes imprinted on his body. The portrayal of his problematic mental issues in such an unconventional and strongly visual fashion expresses Hughes as a victim of the cinema, a man in painful dialogue with his technology and his chosen medium of film. In this system he feeds from the images but the cinema is sapping much more from him. This key relationship between man and medium is echoed in Kane's complex affiliation with the press and in Zuckerberg's associations with the internet and social networking, a core theme that is communicated through the films' specific aesthetic expressions and emphases.

In *The Social Network*, Zuckerberg increasingly becomes a victim of his own technology, expressed through his social exclusion at the end of the film, and it recalls events in relation to these themes of time and perspective. Indeed, Kent Jones sees the creation of Facebook as only being possible at this particular historical moment, "when the word 'communication' has acquired a strange aura of self-parody."[632] The film seems to be inspired by these new and potentially conflicting states of mind more than by time-honoured narratives. In the film, Sean Parker delivers the self-conscious line, "We lived on farms, then we lived in cities and now we're going to live on the internet." One can find objection in this system of reductionism whereby Facebook condenses individuals down to specific sets of data they provide; as Zadie Smith opines, "Everything shrinks. Individual character. Friendships. Language. Sensibility. In a way it's a transcendent experience: we lose our bodies, our messy feelings, our

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[632] Jones, 'Only Connect', p. 35.

desires, our fears."[633] But the film also stimulates a longing for this recent past by encouraging the viewer to think back to a "simpler" time when our social interactions were more genuine and material. The creation of an internet aesthetic, achieved through the film's employment of digital cinematography and formal composition, serves to venerate an earlier technological era, and could be seen to create a sense of nostalgia for certain audiences by displaying earlier, more basic iterations of Facebook. The film's representational strategies construct it as knowingly generation-defining, engaging with temporally-specific technologies to reflect the new ways that audiences not only interact with history, but can identify themselves within it. Concomitantly, the film's aesthetic, in its concern with surface and solipsism, memorialises technology as a way of dealing with societal and cultural issues that have derived from it, highlighting generational particularities as well as functioning as a way of dramatising something potentially very tedious: the invention of a website.

Tracing narrative trajectories: *Citizen Kane* and *The Social Network*

In debates about the historical value of the biographical film, the genre is traditionally identified as a cultural object which brings into question particular types of historical discourse or mediations of the past. Biopics have been based on a variety of source materials, from short stories, memoirs, plays, and novels to autobiographies, biographies, and original research. On account of this proliferation of materials across multiple media, George F. Custen has stated:

> Audiences, exposed to the construct figure through cultural forms,
> approach a film version of the life with a certain degree of prior knowledge.
> What makes a cinematic mediation of the already famous life at all tenable

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[633] Smith, 'Generation Why'.

is the extent to which a particular bricolage of these known facts contains either a new slant on a life or else "classically" organizes what is already known.[634]

Thinking about the appeal of the biopic more specifically, David Payne uses dramatism to explain:

[F]ilm is a highly transformative world, where mythic and idealized powers of transformation are depicted, enacted, and highly personalized and where comparison, contrast, synthesis and merger of our symbolic vocabularies for identity change are crafted, revealed, and disseminated to the public at large.[635]

Cinematic texts provide such a rich medium for biographical narratives because film presents the broadest and most familiar resources for observing social definitions, myths, and cultural scripts about American society. For instance, while *Citizen Kane* and *The Social Network* are products of different societies at particular moments of their evolution, the specific narrative trajectories, thematic principles, character constructions, and audiovisual features of the films can provide insight into various sociocultural and ideological positions around the period of production. More precisely, they present the morals and manners that are significant to the success narrative, such as the centrality of work and ways of dealing with conflict, as well as setting out with the purpose of entertaining, enlightening, and educating audiences.

The focus of both *Citizen Kane* and *The Social Network* on complex, idiosyncratic, and invariably megalomaniacal men is the clearest point of comparison, particularly in the depiction of their business worlds and the extraordinary measures taken to become

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[634] Custen, *Bio/Pics*, p. 180.

[635] David Payne, 'Transformational Therapy in *Don Juan DeMarco*'. Paper presented at the Speech Communication Association conference, San Diego, CA (1996), pp. 3-4. Found in J. Emmett Winn, *The American Dream and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (New York & London: Continuum, 2007), p. 8.

giants of their respective technological words. Both films take a powerful American icon and recycle him as an American myth, each with its own complex design: Welles' film is about the solution of a mystery, whereas Fincher's is about invention and the nascent stages of new American business. Although the film is unable to provide a definitive conclusion to Zuckerberg's story, its focus on the origins of Facebook suggests that perhaps the conception is more important than the culmination.

Although I am hesitant to embark on a new analysis of what Laura Mulvey describes as "the most written-about film in film history,"[636] I wish to use *Citizen Kane* for a specific and experimental purpose, being an investigation of its interpretation as a biographical film and a comparison to what can be considered a modern generic equivalent, *The Social Network*, on thematic, narrative, and aesthetic levels. Both *Citizen Kane* and *The Social Network* are fictional, symbolic recreations of real people turned into mythological figures; both films were produced despite the objections of their respective subjects, and they share similar non-linear narratives that play with both time and perspective. For the protagonists their ambition and success does not truly give them what they want, they remain unfulfilled and are undone by their own actions; they are envied, hated, exalted, and in constant demand, yet they are isolated as anti-heroes of their own narratives. The characters are also quintessentially American in their triumphs and their failures, and can be identified as representing parallel realms of American culture and business. Although Kane and Zuckerberg have contrasting personalities, particular character traits have allowed them to become powerful, enigmatic entrepreneurs of their media empires.

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[636] Laura Mulvey, '*Citizen Kane*: From Log Cabin to Xanadu', in James Naremore (ed.), *Orson Welles's* Citizen Kane*: A Casebook* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 217.

Before I continue, I believe a brief analysis of some of the issues in which *Citizen Kane* engages will provide a fertile backdrop for later discourses concerning narrative trajectories and particular narrational aspects. The film concerns a reporter's search for the meaning of the final word ("Rosebud") of a dying newspaper magnate, Charles Foster Kane. This investigation results in the employment of five flashback sequences as the reporter, Thompson (William Alland), interviews his leads. These flashbacks allows us to peer into the past and reveal key moments throughout Kane's life, from the separation from his mother at an early age to inheriting a fortune by chance and being educated in how to best utilise his new-found wealth. Having chosen to take on running *The Inquirer*, a New York newspaper, Kane begins building a media empire before embarking on a disastrous political career. He also marries twice, first to the President's niece, Emily Monroe Norton (Ruth Warrick), and subsequently to his former mistress, Susan Alexander (Dorothy Comingore), whom he forces into an operatic career. Following the disintegration of both marriages, Kane spends his last years in a secluded state of self-imposed exile at his baroque palace, Xanadu.

When Welles signed his contract in July 1939 with RKO, then a major Hollywood studio, he was given final cut that ensured complete control over what appeared on screen, provided the film did not exceed a modest budget of $500,000.[637] In a defensive statement that addressed some of the controversies that accompanied the film's release, Welles asserts his intentions in making *Citizen Kane*:

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[637] Ellwood, *The Movies As History*, p. 97.

> I wished to make a motion picture which was not a narrative of action so much as an examination of character. For this, I desired a man of many sides and many aspects. It was my idea to show that six or more people could have as many widely divergent opinions concerning the nature of a single personality. Clearly such a notion could not be worked out if it would apply to an ordinary American citizen.[638]

Welles' statement here highlights the importance—or, for him, the necessity—of engaging with such a complex and ambiguous subject, a strong centre around whom the supporting characters can reflect from different points of view. As he notes, Kane is no ordinary American citizen; nor were William Randolph Hearst or Howard Hughes and, it appears, neither is Mark Zuckerberg. It is for this reason that these particular figures are deemed worthy of cinematic biographies, and why these treatments transpire as significant, unorthodox examples of the genre.

While the film has frequently been studied for its formalism and experimental aspects—stylistic devices and technical ingenuity that, for Peter Wollen, place it closer to mannerism, "to a conscious appreciation of virtuosity and the desire to astonish"[639]—its themes of wealth and success and the significance of technology are of greater interest to this study. Writers such as Laura Mulvey, Simon Callow, Robert Carringer and Pauline Kael have chronicled how Orson Welles and Herman J. Mankiewicz desired to "make a coy investigation into the life, career, and politics of Hearst, and so to dramatize the relations among capitalism, power, sex, and modern

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[638] Orson Welles, 'Orson Welles on His Purpose in Making *Citizen Kane*', in Gottesman (ed.), *Perspectives on Citizen Kane*, p. 23. Originally published in full in Frank Brady, *Citizen Welles: A Biography of Orson Welles* (New York: Scribner's, 1989), pp. 283-285.

[639] Peter Wollen from 'Introduction to *Citizen Kane*', *Film Reader* 1 (1975), pp. 9-15. Taken from John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (eds.), *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 29.

mass media in America."[640] This "coy investigation" does not take the form of a

traditional biopic, but *Citizen Kane* did have a tremendous influence on the genre in

the years following its release in terms of pushing the formal envelope of the genre.

While Bingham claims that "*Kane*'s influence on biopics did not even begin to be seen

until *two* decades after its release and was not really felt en masse until forty or fifty

years later,"[641] Morris Dickstein points out the problematic issues that many observers

have encountered by viewing *Citizen Kane* through the films and generic/cinematic

developments that followed it rather than looking at what influenced and shaped the

film itself.[642] For instance, by addressing the sensationalism and excess of yellow

journalism and Kane's "descent from Progressive Era reformism to New Deal

isolationism, fascist sympathy, hysterical anticommunism, and refusal to acknowledge

the causes and extent of the Great Depression,"[643] the film confronts many of the

societal and political issues that were of great significance and concern in the early

1940s and its recent past.

The model of Hearst seems to be more central to the character of Kane in terms of

how he can be used to relate to these larger contemporary issues, particularly

regarding capitalist excess. For Mulvey:

> While the Hearst model is important to the film on a now dated and
> superficial level as an act of iconoclasm, its strength lies not in personal
> detail but in generality. The identifiable Hearst persona is used as a

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[640] Dennis Bingham, *Whose Lives Are They Anyway?*, p. 50.
[641] Ibid., p. 51. Bingham continues by noting: "It has not been documented that Welles and Mankiewicz had their minds on the biopic. They did end up, however, including nearly every convention and character type the genre had developed by 1940" (ibid.).
[642] Morris Dickstein, 'The Last Film of the 1930s', pp. 82-93.
[643] Ibid.

springboard for reflection on wider issues of American politics and myth, especially as personified by the yellow press.[644]

This is something that Welles even admits himself, claiming that when dealing with a fictional character such as Kane one cannot overlook actual figures and events: "Self-evidently, it was impossible for me to ignore American history."[645] The historical enterprise of researching a man's past through the examination of particular sources (predominantly memoirs and interviews) attempts to circumvent this issue by qualifying the story as fact rather than fiction. The sources in *The Social Network* serve the same purpose, though the documented depositions and legal statements are combined with a certain level of guesswork, speculation, and fabrication by both Ben Mezrich (author of the film's source text, *The Accidental Billionaires*) and Aaron Sorkin. In *Citizen Kane*, Thompson tells a female reporter, "I don't think that any word explains a man's life"; the same statement can be applied to Mark Zuckerberg in that a single word—Facebook—similarly fails to explain his life. The biographical depiction of a person's life is the result of a select range of sources that can be taken together, with a certain degree of scrutiny, to reveal significant truths about an individual or elements of the past; it may not yield "the truth," nor may it be a truth that we want to know or from which we can learn, but such is the complexity of the American success narrative.

Rather than overlooking *Citizen Kane* as a biopic on account of its spurious subject matter, it is important to acknowledge the flexibility of the genre. *Citizen Kane* can be

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[644] Mulvey, *Citizen Kane*, pp. 31-32.

[645] Welles, 'Orson Welles on His Purpose in Making *Citizen Kane*', p. 24. He precedes this by stating, "If I had determined to make a motion picture about the life of a great manufacturer of automobiles, I should have found not long after I started writing it that my invention occasionally paralleled history itself. The same is true in the case of my fictitious publisher. He was a yellow journalist. He was functioning as such in the great early days of the development of yellow journalism."

seen to fit into a subgenre that I label the "false biopic," which is comprised of three

distinct sub-categories: narratives about fictional characters told in the style of a

biographical (or autobiographical) account (such as *Forrest Gump* [1994] or *The Curious*

Case of Benjamin Button); biopics about real people that are not based on factual

material (such as *Kafka* and *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind* [2002]); and third, a film

like *Citizen Kane* whose protagonist serves as a proxy, a guise for a real-life figure who

may be inaccessible for legal or other reasons.[646] Involved in each of these examples is

a blending of fact and fiction in variable proportions for dramatic and largely cinematic

purposes. Yet despite their "false" qualities, the impact and influence of these texts on

the genre as a whole has not been diminished and this legacy carries over to

contemporary examples of the biopic.[647] For the reason, by using *Citizen Kane* as a

comparative text in this chapter, I am able to investigate several lines of enquiry

regarding the form and function of the modern biopic, as well as how it intersects with

contemporary practices of historical reassessment.

"What it needs is an angle": biopic conventions, deviations, and developments

In order to explore how *The Social Network* both adheres to and departs from

conventional genre patterns of the cinematic biopic, it is necessary to establish some

of the primary traits and representational strategies associated with the genre. The

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[646] In similar terms, in *Visions of the Past* Rosenstone presents an important dialogue concerning the differences between "false" invention, which ignores the discourse of history, and "true" invention, which engages the discourse of history through alteration, compression, invention, and metaphor. Although he considers the historical film in terms of how it deals with the data and meanings of the past, his arguments also operate effectively when analysing the centrality of issues of truth, fabrication and verisimilitude within the modern biopic. See Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*, pp. 64-79.

[647] Critics and writers such as Pauline Kael, Robert Carringer, Laura Mulvey and Morris Dickstein have noted Welles' indebtedness to the biopic cycle, but Smyth reframes her analysis of the film to encompass Welles' historical perspective, as his dual engagement with both American history and film historiography of the previous decade had not been sufficiently acknowledged: "Welles always conceived of his film as an American biography, his narrative as part of American history."[647] Smyth, *Reconstructing American Historical Cinema*, p. 326.

central biopic features that I consider here are a film's opening and closing titles, the starting of the narrative *in medias res*, non-linear narrative features (flashbacks, montage), close interpersonal relationships, and the prevalence of the courtroom setting or climax. Finally, I will conclude this section by considering how these features impact on the rise-and-fall trajectory of the success story, with particular regard to the significance of the narrative turning point.

For the purposes of chronology, it makes sense to start at the opening of the biographical narrative by considering how the subject is introduced and at what point in their story the film begins. Writing in the early 1990s, George F. Custen discussed the formal elements that comprise the traditional biopic—the narrative components that form the representation of a life—pointing up the presence of introductory titles in the biographical films of the studio era. These are statements that "directly and economically proclaimed a film to be true," but also performed another function as important as the establishment of veracity in that "they could suggest certainty."[648] He also states that, "Unlike most films, almost every biopic opens with title cards that place the piece in context or with a voice-over narration that historically 'sets up' the film,"[649] a convention that asserts the narrative to be one concerned with truth, while also acting as a reminder that most films made in Hollywood are not supposed to be taken as true. The introductory titles, therefore, help to prepare the conditions under which the film will operate from the beginning. *The Social Network* has no such introductory titles, thereby placing the onus of trust on the viewer to be aware that

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[648] Custen, *Bio/Pics*, p. 167.

[649] Ibid., p. 51. However, Custen also admits, "Viewers are given a limited opinion—which they may or may not take—of believing that what they see is, in fact, true" (ibid., p. 53), emphasising that the spectator must discern the veracity and believability of events for themselves.

they are watching a film about Mark Zuckerberg, a character who is never formally introduced through on-screen text, verbal address, or otherwise. This also relies on the film's promotion, its positioning as a major release, and contemporary awareness of both Zuckerberg and Facebook.

Bookending this feature is another biopic convention, the introduction of footage of their subject(s) within the coda of the film, as in Harvey Milk biopic *Milk* or boxing drama *The Fighter*, or even within the narrative itself, such as Harvey Pekar in *American Splendor*. This practice allows the spectator to compare the performance or appearance of the actor with that of the subject, thereby heightening the viewer's awareness of a real person who had previously been interpreted by a performer. However, there is no such footage present in *The Social Network* of the real Mark Zuckerberg, nor of any other central figure, and therefore there is no provision of material with which the spectator can compare performance or appearance.[650] Though this could also be attributed to legal issues, the fact that there is no statement asserting that elements of the story may not be one hundred percent accurate as part of either the film's introduction or coda—the standard, carefully-worded variation of the "all persons fictitious disclaimer" is present in the closing credits (Figure 3.25)[651]— together with Fincher's desire for the actors to interpret their respective characters

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[650] Regarding the public appearance of the real Mark Zuckerberg, Zadie Smith states: "Watching him interviewed I found myself waiting for the verbal wit, the controlled and articulate sarcasm of that famous Zuckerberg kid – then remembered that was only Sorkin. The real Zuckerberg is much more like his website, on each page of which, once upon a time (2004), he emblazoned the legend: *A Mark Zuckerberg Production.* Controlled but dull, bright and clean but uniformly plain, nonideological, affectless." Smith, 'Generation Why'.

[651] This is in contrast to the openness of fabrication exhibited by other recent texts. For instance, *Phil Spector* (2013), David Mamet's HBO biopic of the famous music producer, opens with the disclaimer: "This is a work of fiction. It's not 'based on a true story'. It is a drama inspired by actual persons in a trial, but it is neither an attempt to depict the actual persons, nor to comment upon the trial or its outcome."

without direct consultation, constructs a greater tension between the real and the interpreted. However, it could also be read as making the film more self-contained, distancing it from issues of truth and factual accuracy by not making reference to it with only very simple, factual statements about the current status of the characters presented at the close of the film.

In this regard, Bingham uses the example of Harvey Pekar in *American Splendor*, contrasting the two versions of the man and asking which rendition is more "real": Paul Giamatti's natural portrayal of the character, or Pekar's stylised version of himself in staged interviews. Is Jesse Eisenberg's interpretation of Mark Zuckerberg in *The Social Network* any less valid or "real" than the highly rehearsed and unnatural figure of Mark Zuckerberg that we see on *60 Minutes* or *The Oprah Winfrey Show*? The *American Splendor* illustration also highlights the evolution of critical discourse from the 1970s and '80s when "differences between dramatizations and representations of actuality were discussed as ruptures which would show the ideological assumptions at the root of the fiction and its production."[652] Bingham relates this to Jean-Louis Comolli's concept in his seminal article, "Historical Fiction: A Body Too Much," whereby the actor playing the actual person becomes "the only version of the person that we have as we watch the film, while the two bodies—the body of the actor and the body of the actual person—compete for the spectator's belief."[653] The actor, then, both enacts the posture and appearance of the figure while also emphasising his own separateness from him through the act of performance. However, it is important to acknowledge that the spectator may not always have a clear picture of who the

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[652] Bingham, *Whose Lives Are They Anyway?*, pp. 16-17.
[653] Ibid., p. 17. Jean-Louis Comolli, 'Historical Fiction: A Body Too Much', *Screen* 19.2 (1978), pp. 41-54.

subject is, as they may not have any conception of them at all.[654] In the case of *The Social Network*, while Zuckerberg's name and invention may be familiar, it is probable that the audience is not expected to know a great deal about the man himself due to his lack of mainstream cultural presence. For this reason, Eisenberg's portrayal of Zuckerberg has become the most lasting representation of this real-life figure, considering that there is a paucity of additional information available for comparison.[655]

Among the most distinctive aspects of the cinematic life is the opening of the biopic *in medias res*, a practice in narrative technique of beginning an epic or other fictional form by plunging into a crucial situation that is part of a related chain of events. The commencement at the point of the narrative where protagonists exhibits a talent or concept that will make them famous is an extension of prior events, and is positioned to be developed through later actions.[656] The narrative then proceeds directly with the exposition of earlier events typically supplied through flashbacks, a typical mode of presenting the tale of success. Custen affirms that, by opening life *in medias res*, "the biopic allows the famous figure to invent his or her own future, just as many a powerful figure in Hollywood had erected a new persona and fabricated an invented

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[654] This lack of familiarity tends to fall into two categories: the occasion that a viewer watches a film in order to be informed about a subject of whom they know little or nothing; and secondly, when the film presents a subject who is so enigmatic or reclusive that there is no expectation that people will be familiar with them or have formed a previous opinion.

[655] Since the release of the film, however, it should be noted that Zuckerberg has been more active and visible in the promotion of both professional and personal activities, from spearheading the launch campaigns for his company's products to appearing on TV programmes (such as *The Simpsons* ["Loan-a Lisa," aired 03/10/10] and *Saturday Night Live* [Episode 693, aired 29/01/11]) and posting photos of his wedding to long-term girlfriend Priscilla Chan on Facebook.

[656] In contrast to presenting a narrative's initial scenario in this way, Custen also notes a less common trait in the biopic whereby films "start literally at the character's birth, to show that the gift that would bring the hero fame was present in some embryonic form at life's debut" (Custen, *Bio/Pics*, p. 67).

life history for him or herself."[657] This lends itself to the frequent assertion of the self-made man, what Leo Braudy describes as "a new way to justify American progress and character."[658] The commencement of a biographical narrative in this manner raises questions of objectivity and reliability by playing with the linearity of events and emphasising how the protagonist is able to rewrite their own history.

Flashbacks are a traditional mode of presenting the tale of success by retelling history from the vantage point of particular narrators. For Custen, this feature is a privilege that "allows the narrator to frame the life not just in terms of order and content of events, but to frame its significance."[659] Flashbacks can thus be deployed as framing device, with montage used extensively to suggest the passage of time and allowing for the condensation of a life into an abbreviated form. These two techniques work in tandem to characterise the development of a figure's life. As well as asserting qualities of greatness and marking the teleology of fame, Custen describes montage as "the (nonlinguistic) stylistic equivalent of the linguistic superlative, a device whose very energy sweeps the viewer along"[660] as they follow the cascade of images. As discussed earlier in the section on the internet aesthetic, montage is not employed in *The Social Network* to depict the creation or growth of Facebook, emphasising the fact that the film is less concerned its invention than with its inventor(s).

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[657] Ibid., p. 151. Moreover, as Neal Gabler notes, "such an explanation of fame justified [Hollywood's] own existence, lending credibility to their own fabricated narratives as well as to the narrative films they produced." See Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York: Crown, 1988), p. 189.

[658] Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 510.

[659] Custen, *Bio/Pics*, p. 183.

[660] Ibid., p. 186.

Jorge Luis Borges famously described *Citizen Kane* as "a labyrinth without a center,"[661]

and Thompson's interviews are an attempt to put the pieces back together by

discovering who Kane was and providing insight into his thoughts and motivations.

The flashbacks that result from his interrogations are subjective accounts that are

understandably inconsistent and contradictory; for Mulvey, the prismatic and

fragmented structure of the narrative serves to highlight the "partial, incomplete

nature of human understanding and perception."[662] The testimonial accounts of *The*

Social Network provide a similarly unreliable and inconsistent means of access to the

enigma of Mark Zuckerberg despite the legal basis of these statements. As legal

associate Marylin (Rashida Jones) says at the end of the film, when emotional

testimony is involved, 85% of it is exaggeration with the other 15% being perjury.

Flashback narrations are broken up by discontinuities, while the inconsistencies and

contradictions of individual accounts mark the interviewees as unreliable sources of

truth. Regarding this undercutting of identification and credibility, Mulvey remarks:

> The audience is left without a reliable guide to find their own means of
> interpreting the film. They can come to their own conclusions, but only
> if they break through the barrier of character as the source of meaning,
> and start to interpret clues and symptoms on the screen as might a
> detective or psychoanalyst.[663]

Citizen Kane challenges the traditional structure of the biopic as, rather than having a

unitary point of view and flowing in a linear fashion from its opening *in medias res*, its

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[661] Jorge Luis Borges, '*Citizen Kane*' in Gottesman (ed.), p. 54. Mulvey says of this statement: "When
Borges compared *Citizen Kane* to a labyrinth, he found a very telling image to sum up a narrative
structure that twists and turns through time, through different types of narration, through different
points of view" (Mulvey, *Citizen Kane*, p. 39). However, she also sees the film as being overwhelmingly
dominated by the powerful figure of Kane, a man who yearns for complete control yet finds events
beyond his reach.
[662] Ibid., p. 22.
[663] Ibid., p. 23.

narrative is fragmented, multi-perspectival and non-linear. Bingham believes that these features indicate that "the many sides of a story lead to the crackup of a clear, understandable narrative,"[664] but the non-linear narrative structure can also be seen as a way of mediating and considering the character's intricacies and ambiguities as a form of dramatic exploration. This was especially relevant at a time when, according to Dickstein, "businessmen for the first time became villains rather than heroes of popular culture,"[665] with Kane as one of the most arresting of a series of tycoon figures.[666] Within this narrative system, the newsreel has a specific purpose, standing both "as the official public story, which the film both can and cannot flesh out and move beyond" and "as the conventional wisdom."[667] J.E. Smyth states that *Citizen Kane* "returned to the roots of the [American historical] cycle, reconfronting both traditional historiography's assemblage of fragmentary documents and Hollywood cinema's tendency to edit nuance and development in pursuit of a clear, quickly articulated story."[668] In particular, the "News on the March" sequence signifies the superficial beginning of its encounter with the disjunctive relationship between American myths of success and the decline of heroic history. The newsreel comprises a sonorous barrage of facts, images and information that breaks down the chronology of Kane's life thematically, beginning with a catalogue of the decadence of Xanadu, then working in turn through Kane's personal, political and financial careers. This

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[664] Bingham, *Whose Lives Are They Anyway?*, p. 56.

[665] Dickstein, '"The Last Film of the 1930s; or, Nothing Fails Like Success', p. 85.

[666] In structural terms, the use of flashbacks in *Citizen Kane* can be traced back to cinematic antecedents such as *The Power and the Glory* (1933), a tycoon film written by Preston Sturges and starring Spencer Tracy that was loosely based on the life of C.W. Post. The tycoon movie can be positioned within the larger matrix of the biopic, a filmic category that Dickstein describes as "films about "real" people, nearly always in the heroic mold [that] transposed the Carlylean theory of the Great Man as a mover of History into the Hollywood practice of personalizing the past into rejections of individual courage, willpower, and charisma" (ibid.).

[667] Bingham, *Whose Lives Are They Anyway?*, p. 56.

[668] Smyth, *Reconstructing American Historical Cinema*, p. 309.

provides a superficial public history—one that Bingham believes transforms Kane into "the antithesis of the selfless subject of classical biopics"[669]—that the film subsequently elaborates through Thompson's investigations. The producer's (Philip Van Zandt) famous statement—"It isn't enough to tell us what a man did, you've got to tell us who he was"—essentially reiterates Plutarch's belief that "history describes what people do… while biography reveals who they are."[670]

Citizen Kane also skilfully uses montage to relate the success of Kane's newspaper in the renowned sequence of shots that present *The Inquirer*'s increasing circulation numbers on the front window of its offices (Figures 3.26 and 3.27). *The Social Network* also plays with this convention of displaying numerical figures that indicate the popularity (and therefore success) of a particular product, in this case with a celebration of Facebook's one millionth registered member. However, in contrast to *Citizen Kane*'s montage of the rise of the paper's circulation numbers or the biopic's conventional tableau that conveys a continued rise in fortunes—the star's climb up the record charts in the musical biopic is a familiar device—the party at the offices of Facebook is a subdued culmination of earlier events. Instead of being presented through montage, the counter that registers the number of subscribers (and therefore denotes the company's success) is almost anticlimactically posted on a large screen behind the characters (Figure 3.28), following Saverin's irate and violent outburst having discovered that his shares had been diluted (Figure 3.29). His actions serve as a major distraction by drawing attention away from the success that is being celebrated, and undermine the accomplishments of both Facebook and Zuckerberg.

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[669] Bingham, *Whose Lives Are They Anyway?*, p. 52.
[670] Catherine Parke, *Biography: Writing Lives* (New York: Twayne, 1996), p. 6.

The film's concern with the way in which interpersonal relationships have been affected by modern social media extends to the protagonist's detachment from family, pointing towards the greater issue of failures of familial contact and emotional bonding. In Leo Löwenthal's work on biography, he denotes family as "a key explanatory frame that provides the appropriate environment for fostering the growth of the future famous person."[671] However, it is clearly more difficult to consider the family as the source of support or opposition to the individual when, in the case of *The Social Network*, the structure of family is noticeably absent: we never see any parents (or any other family member for that matter, bar the Winklevoss twins), and they are only very rarely mentioned.[672] Not only does this lack of parental ties contribute to Zuckerberg's paucity of personal relationships, it also removes specific evidence of childhood, or indeed indication of a past of any kind.[673] Parents are neither set up in support of nor in opposition to the ambitions of their children, and yet they are the providers of the college setting where these individuals can excel.[674] Concerning the

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[671] Custen, *Bio/Pics*, p. 69. Leo Löwenthal, 'Biographies in Popular Magazines', in Paul Lazarsfeld and Frank Stanton (eds.), *Radio Research, 1942-1943* (New York: Duell Sloan and Pierce, 1944), pp. 507-548.

[672] For instance, Zuckerberg claims to be meeting his parents as an excuse for not meeting with Divya Narendra and the Winklevosses, and they converse with their father on the phone via his lawyer and he later offers his commiserations after their defeat at the Henley Royal Regatta. Eduardo Saverin also briefly mentions that his family lives in Florida as reason for why the company was registered there.

[673] In contrast to the significant depiction of Kane's upbringing, orphaning and adoption—Kael sees him as emotionally stunted on account of his "miserable, deformed childhood" (Kael, 'Raising Kane', p. 250)—that is used to illuminate the career of Kane, no such explanation is given for Zuckerberg's emotional withdrawal or social ineptness.

[674] There is an existing account of this trend: in Custen's purposive sample of biopics in the studio era, almost half (44 percent) of the famous person's parents are neither seen nor mentioned in the film, with the individual often shown standing alone at the start of their careers even if they gather a company of friends and family along the way. The lack of parental guidance in these instances points towards a greater focus on self-creation—"the free development of talent through the will of an individual who is detached from a family"—that becomes dominant and more significant. Parents are not present to provide opinion about the direction or trajectory over their work, talents, or lives, but they also provide no obstacle of adversity to be surmounted by the protagonist. However, when the family is present, they tend to cause the first instance of estrangement from the individual. See Custen, *Bio/Pics*, pp. 154-156.

separation of the individual from family, Custen sees this as a narrative lack that can be overcome by beginning the biopic *in medias res*: this detachment "would render him or her inhuman, and ultimately unlovable. Thus, as substitutes for the family background the biopic figure loses by the starting the life *in medias res*, Hollywood created omnipresent discourses of friendship and heterosexual romance."[675] This structure allows the biographical subject to exist in the centre of their own narrative, providing them with human contact while also emphasising their remoteness and individuality.[676] Much like *Citizen Kane*, *The Social Network* does not clarify or simplify its protagonist, but clouds meaning and judgment; as Robert Burgoyne says of Welles' film, "*Citizen Kane* suggests that narrative form, and especially the intricate structures of visual narration, obscures as much as it reveals about a person."[677] While other contemporary biographical films, such as *Walk the Line* or *The Aviator*, focus on defining the causative processes that catalyse the development of their protagonists, *The Social Network* neither dramatises childhood experience nor defines a particular turning point, thus distancing Zuckerberg as an individual.

In contrast to the concept of family as a site of resistance, or that of romance as a stabilising influence on the life of the protagonist, the role of the friend in the biopic is often a more complicated issue. For instance, the close friend tends to fall into the category of "the chronicler," who passively spectates and informs about the

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[675] Ibid., pp. 158-159.

[676] Moreover, Bertolt Brecht noted, "The element of conflict in these bourgeois biographies derives from the opposition between the hero and the dominant opinion, which is to say the opinion of those who dominate" (taken from Thomas Elsaesser, 'Film History as Social History: The Dieterle/Warner Brothers Bio-Pic', *Wide Angle* 8.2 [1986], p. 24). This underscores the biopic's central conflict between the protagonist and a given community of people, essentially placing the figure as counter to the dominant force, and therefore rebellious or confrontational by default.

[677] Robert Burgoyne, *The Hollywood Historical Film*, p. 104.

individual's life and events, or "the conscience," who actively provides guidance and influence for the protagonist, as well as acting as a conduit for activating their support.[678] While close personal friendship seems to comprise a significant part of the protagonist's relations, these are not often wholly defined, nor are they equal; as Löwenthal suggests, "the hero appears in his human relationships as the one who takes, not as the one who gives."[679] Laura Mulvey describes the combination of Jedediah Leland (Joseph Cotten), Mr. Bernstein (Everett Sloane) and Kane as "an inseparable triumvirate"[680] in the first section of *Citizen Kane*, a three-way relationship that can be compared to the triumvirate of Zuckerberg, Saverin and Parker. While Saverin's role as both close advisor to the protagonist and mediating observer for the audience, Sean Parker is positioned in opposition to him within the narrative. For Saverin, Parker is both a passive (the restaurant scene,[681] see Figure 3.30) and active (during the confrontation at the offices of Facebook, see Figure 3.31) antagonist, though they do not encounter each other in the legal depositions, thus avoiding direct confrontation. As the narrative progresses and Facebook grows exponentially

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[678] As Custen notes, these figures are often combined with the official roles they play as manager of the career of the great person, creating the third role of "the manager" who handles both the professional endeavours and the private life in an indistinguishable fashion. If the protagonist does not have a clear and established moral compass, than this figure traditionally provides one, "reminding the great one of the nonprofessional values like modesty, honesty, family, and, above all else, love" (Custen, *Bio/Pics*, pp. 162-163).

[679] Leo Löwenthal, 'Biographies in Popular Magazines', in John Durham Peters and Peter Simonsen (eds.), *Mass Communication and American Social Thought: Key Texts 1919-1968* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers), p. 194. Originally published in Lazarsfeld and Stanton (eds.), *Radio Research, 1942-1943*.

[680] Mulvey, *Citizen Kane*, p. 44. In addition, Bingham views *Citizen Kane* as splitting the familiar character type of the sidekick into two characters, Bernstein and Leland, with Bernstein acting as Kane's comic loyalist and Leland closer to the observer/philosopher/mirror archetype, a "moral barometer" (Bingham, *Whose Lives Are They Anyway?*, p. 60).

[681] This scene is a major turning point in the film for Facebook's—and therefore Zuckerberg's— trajectory, marking the shift of influence from Saverin to Parker. The scene features Parker's first major input into the branding of the company, suggesting the title of the site, "theFacebook," be changed to the more simple "Facebook." His reasoning is that this title is "cleaner," and Zuckerberg's immediate appropriation of it—and his stunned response—allies him closer with Parker. In his testimony, Saverin describes this as Parker's "biggest contribution to the company," a comment loaded with admiration and resentment.

successful, Sean Parker becomes the master advice figure, creating a conflict with the "old" friendship between Zuckerberg and Saverin in the forging of a new one.[682] Parker is a more progressive figure with a more ambitious vision for the company that is in direct contrast with Saverin's cautious, conservative approach, and the latter takes on the role of observer-narrator.[683]

Parker becomes Zuckerberg's new (and more trusted) business partner, largely due to his prior experience dealing with Silicon Valley-types, but also on account of their shared vision for the company. Two scenes in the film between Zuckerberg and Parker—one in the swanky restaurant where they first meet (mentioned above), the other taking place in an ultra-hip San Francisco nightclub (Figure 3.32)—emphasise the celebrity lifestyle that Parker embodies; in the latter scenario, access to the club's VIP area clearly impresses someone so frequently excluded by societal groups. The audacious casting of Justin Timberlake as Sean Parker, the entrepreneur who co-founded Napster, seems particularly relevant here given his status as a famous and successful musician.[684] As well as contributing the cultural capital of his popular star

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[682] This relates to another biopic convention of friendship that Custen notes, with the hero frequently having a close friend who supports them through their quest for fame or success: "Often, the famous figure shown in a negative light is one who has lost touch with the neighborhood and old friends. Old friends are often touchstones, reminding heroes, living in some stratosphere, that they generally come from a less exalted sphere" (Custen, *Bio/Pics*, p. 69).

[683] As discussed later, Saverin's role as observer-narrator (akin to the figure of Nick Carraway in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*) is especially pertinent considering that he was a major consultant for *The Accidental Billionaires*, the book on which *The Social Network* is based.

[684] Before it became a (legal) subscription music service, Napster was an independent peer-to-peer file sharing platform that bypassed and contravened the established commercial music market. This led to massive legal difficulties involving copyright and intellectual property violations. Napster was credited with changing the music industry and pushing it into the widespread service of selling digital audio files via internet downloads; as Parker says to Zuckerberg in the film, "Napster wasn't a failure. I changed the music industry for better and for always. It may not have been good business but it pissed a lot of people off."

persona, Timberlake seems to have been cast for this ironic purpose of having a musician playing the part of the man who "brought down" the music industry.[685]

The final convention considered in this section is the frequent presence of the (often fictitious) trial setting or legal proceedings. In the classical biopic, this is frequently used as a condensing device allowing for the extreme abbreviation of life's events, as well as highlighting judgment through dramatic performance. As Custen states:

> Trials lay bare the specific messages of the biopic, encasing one narrative within another on a parallel level of commentary. The presence of trials suggests the purpose of the biopic is to offer up a lesson or judgment in the form of a movie. It is often the case that a public trial affords a better stage for the drama of fame than personal interaction. […] The trial more clearly states the issues in more definite terms than would otherwise be possible, and creates the drama of sides being in clear opposition.[686]

The trial becomes an illustration of the degree to which the protagonist has imposed themselves, in the sense that their actions must be challenged through the instigation of legal action. For Custen, the trial also "tests whether the hero's ideas can be incorporated into the conventional modes of adjudication that signify the force of the community and the judgment of history,"[687] as the opponents tend towards more "conventional" ways of thinking that act as a form of resistance to the subject, thus

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[685] Timberlake is an interesting cultural presence who circulates on multiple media platforms, and as an icon of pop culture celebrity he is a figure upon whom powerful feelings converge; as Steven Shaviro observes of his presence in *Southland Tales* (2006), "You can't forget the celebrity behind the character he plays," especially in a musical sequence that creates a discordance which "only draws our attention still more acutely to Timberlake as a media construct, or celebrity persona." See Steven Shaviro, *Post Cinematic Affect*, p. 84. Incidentally, Timberlake was the only actor to meet his real-life character before filming. On seeing the film, Sean Parker said that it is "a complete work of fiction," adding, "I wish my life was that cool." Quoted in Zee M. Kane, 'Sean Parker: The Social Network is a complete work of fiction', *The Next Web* [Online], 23 January 2011. Available at: http://thenextweb.com/facebook/2011/01/23/sean-parker-the-social-network-is-a-complete-work-of-fiction/, accessed 29/08/11.
[686] Custen, *Bio/Pics*, p. 186.
[687] Ibid., pp. 187-188.

spurring them on through acts of resistance, "fighting organized social power that is hostile, reactionary, and often abusive of power."[688] This trait also illustrates Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony in which the warring ideas of resistance and instability characterise the domination of culture, and the triumph of the individual by virtue of common sense thus confirms their greatness through its expression in clear, unambiguous terms.

Bingham agrees with this custom, stating: "Most 1930s biopics build to a conflict with a major adversary, whom the subject climactically confronts in an open forum (such as a courtroom), a scene whose purpose is to expose 'The Truth'."[689] Whereas *Citizen Kane*'s central conflict is instigated by the subject's campaign for the office governor of New York State, running against Jim W. Gettys (Ray Collins) in the central section of the film, the legal confrontation runs throughout *The Social Network*. Interestingly, however, *The Social Network* could be read as a courtroom drama that is not actually set in a courtroom;[690] instead, the film's legal proceedings take place in the deposition rooms of two law firms. These depositions relate the two separate legal cases brought against Zuckerberg, one by Saverin, the other by the Winklevoss twins and Divya Narendra. The first case (vs. Saverin, Figure 3.5) is conducted in a spacious and well-lit office, surrounded by modern stylings of glass, dual plasma screens, and refined reclining office chairs. The second case (vs. Narendra and the Winklevosses, Figure 3.6) takes place in a far more stately room, with the large oak table, wood-panelled walls and rich brown tones conveying the old money world. Classical effects such as

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[688] Ibid., p. 188.

[689] Bingham, *Whose Lives Are They Anyway?*, p. 63.

[690] It is worth noting that Sorkin has previously worked on courtroom dramas both fictional (*A Few Good Men*, 1992) and biographical (*The Farnsworth Invention* [stage play], 2007).

paintings, leather-upholstered chairs, and old-fashioned lamps enrich a space that is more densely populated with figures.

These deposition scenes are particularly perceptive in highlighting how, as a consequence of being a wealthy individual in America today, one has to spend an awful lot of time in rooms such as this.[691] Formalised accusations are so commonplace and unavoidable that these proceedings have become a frequent occurrence, and thus it would seem overblown to have these events take place in a courtroom. The fact that the film presents less formal, smaller-scale legal depositions rather than the grand, dramatic courtroom trial contributes to the film's anticlimactic impression as the cases draw to a close; there is no jury on which to wait as they deliberate on evidence and testimony, nor is there a judge present to confirm a verdict. Instead, Zuckerberg is merely advised to settle out of court with the monetary figures revealed in the film's coda (Figure 3.33) as neither case is concluded on-screen.[692] This device seems to be an avoidance of the climactic verdict scene—still prevalent in recent biopics from *Erin Brockovich* (2000) to *Behind the Candelabra*[693]—that the film had been building towards, given that its narrative has been structured around the depositions in question. However, the depositions do follow the conventions of the trial setting in some regard by allowing for the abbreviation of events, with flashbacks instigated by characters' legal testimony. The fact that there are two depositions

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[691] This modern convention can be seen in other recent biopics, such as *Behind the Candelabra* (2013) in which world-renowned pianist Liberace (Michael Douglas) ends his formal partnership with his assistant/lover Scott Thorson (Matt Damon), and is forced to defend his estate in legal offices shot in a very similar fashion to the Saverin vs. Zuckerberg scenes in *The Social Network*.

[692] The film's epilogue reveals that Zuckerberg settled with both parties, though Saverin's settlement is unknown and both parties signed non-disclosure agreements.

[693] Further examples of the lengthy legal trial or the climactic courtroom scene in the modern biopic include *The People vs. Larry Flynt* (1996), *The Aviator*, and *Fair Game* (2010), as well as real-life legal dramas such as *Capote* (2005), *Conviction* (2010), and *Lincoln*.

taking place provides the structure for parallel narratives encased within the central biographical narrative, and it is the balancing of these strands that generates the film's narrative momentum. Most significantly, the non-linear device of intercutting between different points of the pair of lawsuits opens the film up to consider the different perspectives that the characters present.[694]

The narrative structure of *The Social Network* is situated around a central turning point, the introduction of Sean Parker. As discussed previously, Parker transforms Facebook by aligning Zuckerberg's vision with his own, encouraging him to think bigger; their initial meeting cements their future business relationship while also eclipsing Saverin's influence. The introduction of Parker's character into the narrative also results in the locational shift of the company to California, further souring the relationship between Zuckerberg and Saverin. *Citizen Kane*'s biographical narrative is similarly divided by particular figures that occupy binary oppositional roles relating to Kane's success: the dramatic rise of Kane's political and marital life is conveyed through Bernstein's account, while his professional failures, disgrace and eventual withdrawal to Xanadu are communicated in the flashbacks instigated by Susan Alexander. The specific transitional point in Kane's narrative can be identified as the moment when he is defeated by Jim Gettys in the campaign for Governor, a juncture that Mulvey sees as marking "the apex of the rise-and-fall structure and switches the movement of the story."[695] However, the structure of *The Social Network* can also be

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[694] As Robert Brent Toplin notes, this is a common facet of the biopic: "Critics of Hollywood dramas often demand complex portraits of the subjects being portrayed. They want to see conflicting viewpoints dramatized, demanding that the filmmaker develop two or more perspectives on historical people, events, and issues rather than just one." See Robert Brent Toplin, *Reel History: In Defense of Hollywood*, p. 23.
[695] Mulvey, *Citizen Kane*, p. 40.

read as a reversal of the separate storylines in *Kane*, as the dramatic rise of the company is a result of Zuckerberg's desire to both undermine Albright, and then later prove himself to her. Instead of detailing the typical decline that follows the subject's initial success, the narrative's second half is conducted by Parker as Zuckerberg's new mentor and business. By shifting from Zuckerberg's motivation to impress Albright to his increasing recognition of Parker's input, this construction operates in terms of Zuckerberg's personal focus and thus relates the protagonist's narrative to the film's thematic emphases.

In both films this first-half "rise" is exemplified and exaggerated by rapid pacing, montage editing, and the continuous stream of information. This seems to fit in with the traditional biopic form of depicting invention, creation, and acquisition resulting in success, neatly exemplified in Zuckerberg's drunken creation of Facemash following his argument with Albright. The second half of each film, following the narrative turning point, notably involves slowing the pace and focusing more on the interrelations between the characters after the protagonist has achieved their success. By deviating from the narrow trajectory of success, the films are able to engage with familiar issues such as mistrust, betrayal, retaliation and litigation. Although I have argued that *The Social Network* exhibits a thematic rise-and-rise structure, in terms of character roles and pacing it displays many similarities to the more traditional rise-and-fall model: despite the fact that Zuckerberg and Facebook continue to reach astronomical levels of success and popularity, later scenes are slower and more reflective, suggesting a decline in Zuckerberg's personal and social life through his unhappiness that is in line with the "fall" segment of the rise-and-fall framework.

<u>"A truth" or "the truth"?: factual veracity in the modern biopic</u>

The relationship between fact and the story of a life—however tenuous—is significant,

relating to the problem of fictive writing that Hayden White raises in *The Tropics of*

Discourse: "Often biographers depart from facts or bend them in order to create a

particular atmosphere or mood or a more consistent figure of a historical person."[696]

Due to the varied constraints on this work, not all significant elements of the film can

be considered here and must be left aside. However, it should be borne in mind that

issues of authorship can be extremely revealing when examining both the history and

the construction of the biographical film. It could be argued, for instance, that there

has been a radical change of influence in terms of the focus of the biographical film,

from the producer-dominated period of the classical studio era to the current

proliferation of screenwriters specialising in biographical narratives.[697] Aaron Sorkin's

relationship with the biographical figure, for instance, is particularly complex, involving

different levels of interpretation and fabrication of factual material to create texts for

both stage and screen.[698] In addition to the conventions addressed so far, Custen

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[696] Hayden White, *The Tropics of Discourse*, p. 99. Moreover, while Ira Nadel defines biography as "fundamentally a narrative which has as its primary task the enactment of character and place through language" (Ira Nadel, *Biography: Fiction, Fact, and Form* [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984], p. 8), Ronald Bergan takes a narrower view when considering the traditions and practices of the biopic, warning that we should not look at it "as we do to a literary biography, to learn the facts of lives under scrutiny" (Ronald Bergan, 'What Ever Happened to the Biopic?', *Films and Filming* 346 [July 1983], p. 22).

[697] Custen details how, in the classical era of the Hollywood studio system, it was the producer that exerted "an enormous the amount of leverage in constructing film lives," only constrained by "factors outside of their own hubris and desires" (Custen, *Bio/Pics*, p. 22). In the studio era, however, there were also several directors who were closely associated with the biopic, such as William Dieterle (*The Story of Louis Pasteur* and *The Life of Emile Zola* [1937]). In contemporary Hollywood cinema, the onus seems to be on the writer in terms of how they want to convey the life of a biographical subject, and the degree to which they deviate from the facts or fabricate their own narrative elements is seen as their responsibility. This group of regular screenwriters that have developed the richest and most interesting accounts of real-life figure includes Aaron Sorkin, Eric Roth (*The Insider*, 1999; *Ali*, 2001), Peter Morgan (*The Queen*, 2006; *Frost/Nixon*, 2008; *The Damned United*, 2009) and Dustin Lance Black (*Pedro*, 2008; *Milk*; *J. Edgar*), and Scott Alexander & Larry Karaszewski (*Ed Wood*, 1994; *The People vs. Larry Flynt*; *Man on the Moon*s.

[698] In this particular regard, Sorkin can be compared to Peter Morgan's frequent reprocessing of history and events into drama in his texts *The Deal* (TV, 2003), *The Queen* (film, 2006), *Frost/Nixon* (theatre,

states: "Involved in the making of any biopic were problems of censorship, problems of casting and star image, and a host of legal issues surrounding the depiction of a real person."[699] The film industry has always been a massive and important producer of cultural texts, but each generation and iteration of the industry reinvents itself in response to extracinematic factors: for Custen, "a life on film tended to reference not historical texts but the almost hermetic systems of reference established in previous films."[700] However, despite the necessity and dependence on research and fact-based filmmaking, entertaining narratives capable of winning audience sympathy (and thus selling more tickets) were a greater concern than historical accuracy, with the latter factor only attractive so long as it could be used as a marketable strategy.[701]

This leads us to the discourse surrounding the factual veracity of the film itself. Much has been noted about the differences between Sorkin's script and Ben Mezrich's source material,[702] and perhaps if there were a greater distinction between fact and

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2006; film, 2008), *The Damned United* (film, 2009), and *The Special Relationship* (TV, 2010). Sorkin has dealt with real-life or reality-based drama before, having written *The Farnsworth Invention*, a stage play about Philo Farnsworth's development of television and the theft of his design by David Sarnoff, president of the Radio Corporation of America. Sorkin also adapted *60 Minutes* producer George Crile's nonfiction book *Charlie Wilson's War* for the 2007 film, a biographical comedy-drama about a Congressman who organises a covert operation to support the Afghan mujahedeen in their resistance to Soviet occupation at the height of the Cold War. This adaptation also drew criticism for its bending of the truth for dramatic purpose and its avoidance of certain political issues in regards to the events of 9/11. See Melissa Roddy, 'Tom Hanks Tells Hollywood Whopper in "Charlie Wilson's War"', *AlterNet.org* [Online], 21 December 2007. Available at: http://www.alternet.org/story/71286/, accessed 29/10/13.

[699] Custen, *Bio/Pics*, pp. 110-111.

[700] Ibid., p. 111.

[701] A good example of this is *The Story of Alexander Graham Bell* (1939), a film about the enigmatic young inventor that linked a love story to the invention, thus "intertwining romance and commerce"[701] in a manner far removed from *The Social Network*. Producer Darryl F. Zanuck insisted on fictionalising parts of the film for dramatic purpose in contrast to the research-oriented approach that early draft of the script took, including uniting all conflicting parties at a climactic public trial, a narrative device Zanuck also employed in *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939). See Custen, *Bio/Pics*, p. 128.

[702] Though Sorkin met with Mezrich in a Boston hotel and the two men later compared notes as they did independent research, each was writing his own version of the story: Sorkin says, "I didn't get a look at any of the book until the screenplay was almost finished" (quoted in Harris, "Inventing Facebook"). Mezrich's book has a brief author's note in which he explains that he re-created scenes using his "best

fiction within the film then there may have been fewer problems with issues of truth and facticity; instead we are confronted with a level of dramatic license that is brought into question by the youthful and innocent qualities of the film's protagonists. But whereas *The Accidental Billionaires* is told very much from the side of Saverin, Sorkin's screenplay employs a multi-perspectival approach that allows each side of the story— those of Zuckerberg and the Winklevosses, as well as Saverin's—to be told, with different, sometimes contradictory takes on the events that led to the creation and success of Facebook. Sorkin says, "I didn't choose one and decide that it was the truth. I dramatized the fact that there were conflicting stories."[703] In lieu of relying on factual accounts and biographical profiles, he chose to create Zuckerberg as a fictional character, a subject sprung from his imagination with a mélange of character traits: "prickliness, intelligence, verbosity, wit, arrogance, and occasional dead-eyed blankness."[704]

Despite the fact that Sorkin describes the film's narrative structure as "*Rashomon*-like," there is less of a focus on the conflicting narratives than on the perspectival differences, communicated through dense dialogue rather than narrative description. Prior narrative events are frequently set into motion by the legal depositions, removing ambiguities that would otherwise dictate how the viewer evaluates truthfulness. The two strands are therefore mutually reinforcing, leaving little room for speculation between factual veracity and what is offered by the narrative.

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judgment," and thanks Eduardo Saverin, "without whom this story could not have been written." See Ben Mezrich, *The Accidental Billionaires: Sex, Money, Betrayal and the Founding of Facebook* (Arrow, 2009), pp. 1-2. The book also contains a slim bibliography but no footnotes, leading several critics to question the sincerity and reliability of it as a work of nonfiction.

[703] Quoted in Harris, 'Inventing Facebook'.

[704] Ibid.

However, the film's ambiguities lie in its characterisations and the motivations of those involved in the creation of Facebook. Unlike *Citizen Kane*'s interviewer/interviewee technique that provides a clear impression of various characters' differing perspectives, *The Social Network* gradually and subtly shifts perspectives and sympathies as the film progresses. Instead of initiating personal flashbacks, the legal proceedings are used as a framing device for the action and drama at the centre of the creation of Facebook, contextualising them rather than merely serving as an introduction.

Andrew Clark views *The Social Network* as dishonest in its presentation of real-life individuals and events, a blurring of fact and fiction that he dubs "factionalism." He states:

> *The Social Network* occupies that curious niche of film-making loosely termed "docudrama". It is carefully described on its official website as "a story about the founders of the social networking website Facebook" – that's "a story", rather than "the story" of Facebook's creation. In other words, it's in a deeply blurred territory mixing fact, rumour, speculation, insinuation and an inventive "filling-in" of detail in a big-screen portrayal of living, breathing individuals.[705]

Clark considers this genre of scriptwriting to be "insidious,"[706] citing such precedents as *Primary Colors* (1998), *The Ghost* (2010), and the 2003 David Hare play *The Permanent Way*; but all these texts try to hide—or at least thinly veil—the characters within, so as to create a product that is legally sound but no less controversial or sensationalised when it comes to having biased or imbalanced narrative perspectives.

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[705] Andrew Clark, 'The Social Network and docudrama dishonesty', *The Guardian* [Online], 24 September 2010. Available at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/andrew-clark-on-america/2010/sep/23/facebook-mark-zuckerberg, accessed 29/08/11.
[706] Ibid.

Journalism, as a profession, requires making clear the distinctions between fact and fiction, between documented truth and unverified conjecture and, as Clark points out, "blurred dramatisations go against every professional instinct"[707] as it is not their ultimate objective to reach the truth. Sorkin claimed to be relieved that Zuckerberg declined requests to co-operate with the making of the film, an action presumably initiated for legal reasons given that both Sorkin and Fincher agree that his involvement or that of Facebook would have negatively impacted on the film itself.[708] Instead, Sorkin chose to draw from the claims by Saverin and the Winklevosses over ownership and rights to the business to form his story arc, a partially fictionalised drama based in fact.

Clark questions whether Zuckerberg *deserves* this treatment, "to have his name dragged through the mud in a murky mixture of fact and imagination for the general entertainment of the movie-viewing public."[709] Question marks can be raised over the degree to which Zuckerberg can be seen as a public figure,[710] given his lack of media presence and his righteous decision to keep his private life private. But this also appears to be his downfall; as Harris asserts, "One of the problems with so self-consciously presenting yourself as a blank slate is that you invite others to draw all

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[707] Ibid.

[708] Sorkin says, "I'll be honest – I'm grateful. We wanted to be able to say we tried really hard, and we did. But we did not want Mark participating, because we did not want to give the sense that this was a Facebook-endorsed movie, a puff piece of some kind." Quoted in Harris, 'Inventing Facebook'.

[709] Clark, 'The Social Network and docudrama dishonesty'.

[710] Interestingly, this issue has become more culturally relevant, forming a plotline for an episode of the US legal drama series *The Good Wife*, titled 'Net Worth' (aired 15/02/11). The plot concerns a young internet billionaire named Patric Edelstein (Jack Carpenter)—a clear pastiche of Eisenberg's Zuckerberg—who is suing a movie studio for producing a film of his life that he considers to be unflattering "because he wants the world to know it's untrue." From his point of view, he is not a public figure, but his legal team admits that, "It doesn't matter that he didn't pursue the public eye, the public eye pursued him."   The episode concludes with the notion that it is that it is up to society, not the individual, as to whether they are considered to be a "public figure".

over you."[711]   This relates to Custen's observation that biopics are "often the only

source of information many people will ever have on a given historical subject,"[712]

particularly relevant when examining withdrawn figures (such as Hughes and

Zuckerberg), individuals who have chosen not to engage with the public domain and

value their privacy.   Due to the absence of a public persona, the filmic character

becomes the primary source of information with which the individual is associated,

with the actor's interpretation assigning particular characterisations onto the real-life

subject.   However, Clark's view seems to miss the point entirely: the founding of

Facebook is an interesting one, a story that deserves attention and further study.

Furthermore, this story also has the potential for the filmmakers to explore an array of

significant contemporary issues without forming a definitive or inarguable protagonist

in Mark Zuckerberg, tied to his malleability and status as a "blank slate" of cultural

iconicity.   The film is designed to eke out personal perspectives and realisations of the

characters, to create different dialogues with individual spectators, and to stimulate

discussion among them.

In an article on the unconventional Canadian biopic *Thirty Two Short Films About Glenn

Gould* (1993), David Scott Diffrient defines the "antibiopic" as "a discursive reversal

and undermining of the traditional eulogizing, hagiographic, and totalising impulses in

biography forms."[713]   The non-linear narrative can be seen to be a Brechtian

dramaturgical effect, a metaphorical expression of thematic concerns, introducing

ruptures that "provoke   mentally   active,   rather   than   passive,   spectatorial

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[711] Harris, 'Inventing Facebook'.
[712] Custen, *Bio/Pics*, p. 7.
[713] David Scott Diffrient, 'Filming a Life in Fragments: *Thirty Two Short Films About Glenn Gould* as "Biorhythmic-Pic"'. *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 36:2 (Summer 2008), p. 95.

involvement."[714] Much like the film of Diffrient's study, *The Social Network* seems to undermine "the dialectic of the 'right' path versus the 'wrong' path to success or fame—a dichotomy that is rendered inadequate to the challenge of creating a more amorphous and morally complex worldview—while leaching away the primacy of emotion that leaves its residue well after the traditional biopic hero's ultimate triumph."[715] The film accomplishes this through complicating the moral motivations of the characters: the protagonists are neither exalted nor demonised as they all maintain their humanity. This is achieved, as Justin Chang notes, despite Parker being perceived as a "brazen opportunist," the Winklevosses projecting "rich-boy entitlement," and Saverin lending the film its "strong moral counterweight as the sensible superego to Mark's raging id."[716] The film also makes it clear that Zuckerberg, despite his obvious faults and ambiguous motivations, does have a conscience, underlining his lamentations at the close the film for what might have been with Albright. During the opening break-up, Zuckerberg understands neither the reason nor the manner by which Albright is breaking up with him, asking "Wait, wait, this is real?" While natural sympathies may fall on the side of Saverin,[717] the film is composed of many layers—moral, emotional, social—that seem to argue both for and against each of the central characters involved. It is the humanity of the principals that prevents the film becoming reductive or conventional; by eliminating definitive boundaries of right and wrong, the film forces the spectator to question their own opinions, a characteristic that may explain why the film (and its characters) have been so roundly debated and discussed since its release.

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[714] Ibid.

[715] Ibid.

[716] Chang, 'Speedy "network" connection'.

[717] The book from which the screenplay drew "inspiration" was written with the collaboration of Saverin before he signed a non-disclosure agreement with Facebook.

Unlike *Thirty Two Short Films*, however, it can be argued that *The Social Network* does reflect a more revisionist mode of cultural and generic expression in its rejection of "truth" and "fact." The end of the film seems to confirm its status as a myth, and rather than eulogising the success of the protagonist the film chooses to explore the indeterminate and incidental nature of Zuckerberg's success; yes, he indubitably possesses an exceptionally gifted mind for computer programming and the potentials of technological thought and conception, but the film manages to detail the moments of coincidence and the fortuitous events that led to the creation of Facebook,[718] with fortune and (unwanted) fame being the manifestations of its success. By approaching its subject matter in this way, the film eschews many of the genre's archetypal principles, and thus the traditional biopic is framed in decidedly untraditional terms.

While the producers of biopics during the studio system sought to develop a strategy for shaping a life according to conventional filmmaking practices, there was also a desire to provide a unique slant to the genre; for Custen, the biopic thus developed "distinctive narrative strategies which, with few exceptions, offered particular ideologies of fame based on a limited menu of discourses and situations."[719] Rosenstone makes a clear distinction between fiction and history: "both tell stories, but the latter is a true story."[720] He claims that literal truth is not possible either on the screen or on the printed page; there is an inevitable rendering of events, a selection of small amounts of evidence to stand in for the larger, unrestricted experience of history, a convention that Rosenstone labels "condensation." "But isn't

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[718] Mezrich's book is titled *The Accidental Billionaires*, after all.
[719] Custen, *Bio/Pics*, p. 148.
[720] Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*, p. 69.

there a difference between *Condensation* and invention?" Rosenstone asks. "Isn't creating character and incident different from condensing events? Is it not destructive of 'history?' Not history on film. On the screen, history must be fictional in order to be true!"[721] Indeed, while filmic literalism is impossible and it may, therefore, be wiser not to even attempt to achieve it, filmmakers can focus their creative energies on simply telling a good story: "Of course, historical recounting has to be based on what literally happened, but the recounting itself can never be literal. Not on the screen and not, in fact, in the written word,"[722] Rosenstone affirms. This notion that invention does not necessarily violate historical truth leads Bingham to question, "If biopics partake of fiction in making their subjects' lives real to us, how is the biography a kind of history?"[723] Catherine Parke's study of literary biography suggests that historically a "tug of war" has taken place among fiction, biography, and history, "with biography in the middle."[724]

There is a particularly byzantine issue with film and its ability to provide information to the spectator that is disproportionate with text that can generalise and summarise information efficiently. Rosenstone believes:

> Film, with its need for a specific image, cannot make general statements about revolution or progress. Instead, film must summarize, synthesize, generalize, symbolize – in images. The best we can hope for is that historical data on film will be summarized with inventions and images that are apposite. Filmic generalizations will have to come through various techniques of condensation, synthesis, and symbolization.[725]

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[721] Ibid., p. 70.
[722] Ibid.
[723] Bingham, *Whose Lives Are They Anyway?*, p. 8.
[724] Parke, *Biography: Writing Lives*, p. xvi.
[725] Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*, p. 71.

Rosenstone's appeal that we must read by new standards and this sense of redefinition and reassessment carries over to the present era of the biopic in terms of what *The Social Network* symbolises for the development of the genre. This dialectic between truth and invention is at the heart of the biopic, and the negotiation between the two informs the extent to which the spectator can identify with both the *character* and the *actual person*. Bingham succinctly summarises the multifaceted dynamism and the general appeal of the genre:

> The biopic is a genuine, dynamic genre and an important one. The biopic narrates, exhibits, and celebrates the life of a subject in order to demonstrate, investigate, or question his or her importance in the world; to illuminate the fine points of a personality; and for both artist and spectator to discover what it would be like to be this person, or to be a certain type of person. […] At the heart of the biopic is the urge to dramatize actuality and find in it the filmmaker's own version of truth.[726]

So as well as discovering and elucidating a particular historically or culturally significant figure through characterisation, Bingham highlights the centrality of finding "a version of truth" rather than "the truth" through dramatic formation and formal interpretation. But I believe there is an additional perspectival distinction in the potential disparity between the filmmaker's version of the truth—in terms of their interpretation of the figure—and the spectator's perception of the truth that they take away from the film. In the cases of *Citizen Kane* and *The Social Network*, the semi-biographical nature of the texts leaves them deliberately open for ambiguities and individual interpretation concerning the veracity and verisimilitudes they convey.[727]

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[726] Bingham, *Whose Lives Are They Anyway?*, p. 10.

[727] For instance, Sorkin is proud of *The Social Network*'s refusal to take sides, saying, "I'm happy we didn't take a position, and I'm happy for audiences to come out of the theater arguing about it. Regardless of what they conclude about who invented Facebook, there is no question that Mark Zuckerberg is a genius. He doesn't just have brains. He created something." Quoted in David Carr, 'Film

As Bingham states, "The truth about a subject, especially one presented through the filters of time, memory, subjectivity, image, and representation, can never be captured, but neither can curiosity about the people our world isolates and magnifies ever be quenched."[728] Although part of the appeal of the biopic lies in seeing an actual person transformed into a character, their private behaviour and actions interpreted dramatically, a biopic may also need to explain why its subject belongs in the pantheon of cultural mythology, a process complicated by the current focus on more diverse figures and extremely recent events. The contemporary fascination with celebrity culture, advances in online social networking, and the non-stop proliferation of knowledge, gossip and speculation has fuelled an interest in young figures that exemplify particular social concerns. The popularity of such stories and figures is evidenced in Hollywood's turn to recent lives for biographical narratives, based on ever more revelatory and current biographies and accounts. This has important consequences for the framing of lives and the depiction of the recent past in terms of historical consciousness, as these films engage with the actions and memories of living people. This is perhaps reflective of a similar tendency in 1950s biopics,[729] though unlike the control that still-living subjects retained over their representations, modern biography is far less reverential, and there has been a significant shift in which figures and events are deemed open or acceptable for popular consumption.

Version of Zuckerberg Divides Generations'. *The New York Times* [Online], 03 October 2010. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/04/business/media/04carr.html?_r=1, accessed 31/08/11.

[728] Bingham, *Whose Lives Are They Anyway?*, pp. 69-70.

[729] Particular biographical films were concerned with sex scandals (*Beau James*, 1957), drugs (*The Gene Krupa Story*, 1959), alcoholism (*Beloved Infidel*, 1959), abusive relationships (*Love Me or Leave Me*, 1955), and mental breakdown (*Fear Strikes Out*, 1957). Of this series of biopics, Eldridge states that the "figures in Fifties' biopics were not simply distant characters recalled from vaguely remembered history lessons or books, but were now part of the living memories of many members of the audience." Eldridge, *Hollywood's History Films*, p. 154.

<u>The public-private dynamic and the thematic influence of fortune</u>

The Social Network is not a film about Facebook; it is a film about Mark Zuckerberg, a fictionalised account of how a Harvard drop-out became the youngest billionaire in the world. Zuckerberg is an enigmatic computer wunderkind with a binary personality, a figure that serves as a contemporary addition to cinema's crazed forefathers who laid the foundations of America's divided self, studies of monomaniacal geniuses such as Charles Foster Kane in *Citizen Kane*, Howard Hughes in *The Aviator*, and Daniel Plainview in *There Will Be Blood* (2007). *The Social Network* is ostensibly an exploitation of the internet generation's bipolar status as both voyeur and exhibitionist, but it also deals with another dualism central to the biopic: the dynamic between the public and the private. Zuckerberg's complex psychology veers between neurotic and charismatic in his desperation to be a part of the in-crowd, to join a Harvard final club; "They're exclusive. And fun and they lead to a better life," he says in the film's opening scene, and his denial is emphasised by the moment when the Winklevoss twins meet with him at the illustrious Porcellian Club (Figure 3.34), with the society's rules dictating that non-members are not permitted past the bike room. As his company blossoms and expands, the tension between Zuckerberg's public success and his private failure develops into one of the film's primary thematic concerns.

This part of the chapter explores this public-private binary in relation to the success story, a narrative form in which public success is often contrasted with failure in the private sphere, a certain social ineptitude that frequently involves the male protagonist's relationships with women and other non-business matters. I will also

examine how public success relates to public wealth by identifying the emphases placed on money and materialism as markers of success. This paradigm can affirm or problematise concepts of wealth and fortune, as in the case of *The Social Network* the materiality of money is complicated by the concept of Facebook as a virtual product. It is therefore important to analyse the conception of success, how it is represented in terms of space, mise-en-scène and iconography, and how wealth is conveyed publicly through material ostentation. For example, *The Social Network* and *Citizen Kane* depict wealth and fortune in very different ways, and it is therefore necessary to consider how the characters' treatment of money problematises spectatorial sympathies and involvement. I also question whether the concept of the Great Man is still relevant in the contemporary biopic, identifying a shifting paradigm due to changes in business and culture. There is a focus in both films on class and how social standing affects one's ability to achieve success, a topic that corresponds to surrounding issues of social mobility and privilege, as well as traditional concepts of luck and opportunity that are intrinsic to the success narrative in both literature and film.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the opening scene of *The Social Network* introduces the audience to Zuckerberg's private failure in the swift termination of his relationship with Erica Albright. Her rejection of him sets Zuckerberg off as a force of revenge (seemingly for an entire unappreciated demographic of Harvard geeks), and his creation of Facemash involves a series of manoeuvres which conceal the breakdown of his relationship, a private failure that is not recognised by others. It is the essence of failure and humiliation in these opening scenes that sets up this

fascinating public-private dynamic. This private failure prompts him to develop a project where relationships are central to its operation. As we soon learn, Zuckerberg is an exceptionally gifted and intelligent young man with a particular knack for computer programming, talents which allow him to excel and achieve far-reaching public success with Facebook. However, coupled with his break-up with Erica, Zuckerberg's lack of close personal friends[730] points towards a larger social issue, an absence in his life (and his character) that remains unfilled for the duration of the film.

What is interesting about this public-private binary—the contrast of his tremendous business success and his resolute failure with personal relationships—is how they feed into each other, how one reinforces and re-emphasises its opposite: it is his break-up with Albright that sparks the creation of Facemash, a nascent prototype for what would eventually be Facebook, yet his public success has a detrimental effect on his relationships by driving people away from him, Saverin in particular. Beyond a brief dalliance with Alice (Malese Jow), a young aficionada, in the bathroom stall of a restaurant, Zuckerberg develops no other sexual relationships, and the final scene in which reaches out to Albright through the ironic proffering of a Facebook friend request suggests that he has been preoccupied by her absence throughout the film.[731] Like *The Searchers* (1956), a Western that exemplifies a male-dominated genre's obsession with women, the film is bookended by the presence of Zuckerberg's object

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[730] As discussed in earlier sections of this chapter, Zuckerberg's best friend, Eduardo Saverin, is eventually ousted from the company and replaced by Sean Parker, representing his focal shift from a homosocial friendship to a business-orientated partnership.

[731] It is surprising that Albright even has a Facebook account, seeing as it is Zuckerberg's creation, yet her presence of the site implies that Facebook has become ubiquitous, an almost inescapable product: everyone is on Facebook, even if she remains out of reach. Albright's profile picture depicts her in formal attire holding a wine glass, thus aligning her with a higher-class lifestyle—so elusive for Mark yet *de rigueur* for his antagonists, the Winklevosses—and emphasises her detachment from him.

of desire and he is unable to quell his obsession for the film's duration.[732] When

Parker tells Zuckerberg that he created Napster in order to impress a girl, Zuckerberg

asks him if he ever thinks about her; Parker dismissively replies, "No"—as if to say "are

you kidding?"—and it becomes clear the Albright is still preying on his mind. The

creation of a phenomenally popular and rapidly-expanding online social networking

site succinctly juxtaposes Zuckerberg's paucity of personal relationships given his

disconnection from those around him and Facebook's remit to make everyone "more

connected."

To put Zuckerberg's predicament into context, Custen notes the problems that tend to

accompany success: "The lesson one learns from biopic vicissitudes, at least on the

surface, is quite simple: with an unusual gift comes unusual suffering."[733] As other

writers such as Leo Löwenthal and Theodor W. Adorno have suggested of other

popular forms of narrative, the audience member that views misfortune in popular

film is "reassured that a normal, obscure life is perhaps preferable to the proverbial

price of fame."[734] Another biopic convention is to suffer through misfortune in order

to achieve a form of salvation, often in the shape of the family, the community or the

home: "It is in these tensions—between home and public, between opposing

communities, and between definitions of family—that the lessons of fame are

created,"[735] Custen states. Present here is a set of related attributes belonging to the

Great Man of the biographical film that both allows him to achieve great success (this

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[732] In *The Searchers*, Ethan Edwards' (John Wayne) niece Debbie (Lana Wood) is abducted by Comanche tribesmen. Debbie is found after five years, memorably played by Natalie Wood, now an adolescent and living as a Comanche, having married their chief, Scar (Henry Brandon). Debbie is eventually rescued and returned home to her family.
[733] Custen, *Bio/Pics*, p. 75.
[734] Ibid.
[735] Ibid., p. 76.

"unusual gift"), and results in a deficiency that leads to private failure (the "unusual suffering"). These features are presented as distinct consequences resulting from the effects of fame and success, though they may in fact be caused by other direct forces such as family and community influences.

Both Zuckerberg and Charles Foster Kane are shaped by their failures, though the results of these are somewhat different. Unlike the metaphorical spark provided by Erica Albright that ignites the tinder of Facebook and leads to Zuckerberg's success (i.e. his private failure stimulates his public success), Kane's failures in his private life arise from his abortive marriages and his problematic affair with Susan Alexander. These failed relationships demonstrate how his public success has precipitated his private failure, a downfall that can be traced narratively. The juxtaposition between the two spheres of public and private also reveal the romantic ineptitudes of both Kane and Zuckerberg when it comes to relationships, in contrast to the professionalism and proficiency they demonstrate in their business worlds.[736] Kane's attempt to merge his professional success with a romantic relationship by transforming Alexander into an opera star is a catastrophic and much-derided failure, driving a wedge through their relationship through his foolhardy determination. This ineptitude is contrasted with Kane's business acumen that allows him to become such a powerful and illustrious media mogul, and this failed venture initiates of his downward trajectory, the first of many public failures that leads to his seclusion and eventual death.[737] The tensions to

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[736] There is however, an important distinction in that Kane is characterised as a superior businessman in comparison to Zuckerberg's aptitude for technological innovation.

[737] There is also a certain irony in how his initial private failure becomes public, in that the details of his alleged affair with Susan Alexander during his first marriage—a relatively innocent meeting between two people—becomes public knowledge when leaked to the press by his political enemies, leading to both the dissolution of his marriage and the abrupt culmination of his career in politics.

which Custen alludes are present in the success story on some level in order to balance events, with success inevitably incurring alternate forms of failure, and this relates to how audiences are able to relate to these protagonists through the relativity of fortune and misfortune.

The class tension at play in *The Social Network* goes beyond the familiar "jocks versus nerds" social structure of the collegiate film with added dimensions comprising notions of "old money" versus the nouveau riche, WASPish Harvard entitlement versus largely Jewish and Asian intellectual strivers, and the exclusivity and distinction of particular societal and professional affiliations. However, the film's characters may have similar ambitions in spite of their different motivations, and David Brooks notes that "Zuckerberg is as elitist as the old Harvardians, just on different grounds,"[738] on account of his relentless desire for success and acceptance. The central tension of his character derives from the contrast of his outward success and his inward failure: despite Facebook's popularity he remains incapable of forming lasting, emotional and personal connections, unable to interact successfully with those around him. Yet his social failings also create sympathy for the character, making him relatable as neither an antagonist nor an anti-hero but something more complex: Brooks asserts that, "despite all his bullying, he deeply feels what he lacks, and works tirelessly to fill the hole. [...] [T]his is a movie propelled by deficiency, not genius."[739] Ultimately, Zuckerberg's power relates not to how he spends his money, but the way in which he denies it from others: he refutes the claim of the Winklevosses that the success of

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[738] David Brooks, 'The Facebook Searchers'. *The New York Times* [Online], 7 October 2010. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/08/opinion/08brooks.html, accessed 22/07/11.
[739] Ibid.

Facebook stemmed from their concepts, while he eventually forces Saverin out of the company by diluting his shares.

In contrast to Zuckerberg's lack of monetary expenditure or material indulgence, *Citizen Kane* engages with spatial boundaries to express the success of its protagonist. The opening scene of *The Social Network* introduces the character of Mark Zuckerberg as an essential paradox, a multitude of contradictions, and suggests that the film's public-private dynamic will be played out on the character himself rather than in spatial terms. For instance, in contrast to *Kane*'s elaborate visual effects—such as the famous transition between the winter scene and Kane's snow globe—*The Social Network* has fewer ostentatious visual devices: there are two instances in which the camera is able to move through objects, with both shots occurring during party scenes, though these special effects sequences are not designed to contravene the privacy of the characters, instead merely operating as stylistic flourishes.[740] The first occurs during the discussion between Parker and Zuckerberg in the nightclub, the second at the house party at the end of the film, and the fluidity of camera movement is closely tied to the sense of musical enjoyment and youthful excess in these scenes.

Citizen Kane demonstrates a greater interest in the physical boundaries between public and private, making them apparent before deliberately breaking them. By way of example, the "No Trespassing" sign at the beginning of the film addresses the audience by presenting them with a barrier to their viewing of events, before immediately breaking down this obstacle by passing through the wire fence,

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[740] Fincher has previously employed this stylised movement of the camera through objects in other films, most notably in *Fight Club* (1999) and *Panic Room* (2003).

"trespassing" into Kane's secluded world and the subsequent history of his life. As Laura Mulvey states, "The film's opening sequence sets up the relationship between camera and spectator and establishes it as one of curiosity and investigation."[741] By declaring that the proprietor does not wish us to trespass, the information contained within that space can be inferred to be worthy of exploration, thereby piquing our collective interest. There is a definite obituarial quality to the opening of *Citizen Kane*, of looking back into the significance of a man's life; this theme continues throughout the film as the camera moves through static, structural objects such as doors and windows to "trespass" on important personal scenes between characters. The camera's interpolation into such private spaces suggests a narrational omniscience that is unconstrained by such boundaries.[742]

In *Citizen Kane*, the protagonist's public successes in business and in media are subsequently emphasised by two further means: the building of the palatial estate of Xanadu and the filling of it with innumerable works of art, furniture and other belongings that demonstrate the vastness of his fortune and his ability to acquire whatever he desires. These are deliberately ostentatious expressions of his public success that mask the private failure that often take place within his mansion. Kane builds Xanadu to create the illusion of control—an "absolute monarchy"—and yet this becomes the locus of his downfall, the place where he becomes increasingly distanced from his wife and his friends. When living there with Susan, they are frequently depicted at opposite ends of giant rooms or wandering aimlessly along corridors with

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[741] Mulvey, *Citizen Kane*, p. 24.
[742] This is further underscored by the frequent closing of doors in the film, often during scenes between Kane and Susan Alexander as they attempt to maintain the privacy. The door is then either opened by one of the characters or the camera simply moves through the object, thus denying them this privacy and revealing the events in question to the spectator.

barely any recognition of each other's presence (Figure 3.35), and this contrasts with the more densely populated grand settings of Kane's public success, such as the support present at his political speech (Figure 3.36). Yet this distancing is also hinted at before in his first marriage to the President's niece, as the montage of scenes between them at the breakfast table emphasise the loss of intimacy and the physical distancing between them over time as their marriage deteriorates (Figures 3.37 and 3.38). Space is used to denote Kane's inherent success, and Xanadu creates a suitable iconographic milieu with its lengthy hallways, high ceilings, and giant fireplaces. Together with the abundance of sculptures, paintings, and other artwork, these features form an archetypally palatial and decadent mise-en-scène.[743] Yet there is also a tremendous pathos in the empty Xanadu due to Kane's inability to fill this space with either people (friends and family rather than staff and servants) or meaningless and expensive possessions.

These spatial negotiations have far less significance in *The Social Network*, largely due to manner in which wealth and fortune is dealt with by the characters; Zuckerberg in particular seems largely unchanged by his newly-acquired fortune, not demonstrating his success though material expression and iconography. Instead of depicting Zuckerberg's domestic space, the film creates a disjuncture of the domestic/non-domestic dynamic by suggesting that the offices of Facebook seem to have become his home by the end of the film. This environment is modern, pristine and colourful without being overly ostentatious, and Zuckerberg is shown to be the last person there

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[743] Smyth views Kane's acquirement of whole series of European sculptures and paintings as a desperate attempt to purchase an entire cultural history: "in effect, collecting a history and transporting it to the barren cultural landscape of the United States." Smyth, *Reconstructing American Historical Cinema*, p. 334.

as the lights are ominously switched off. While private failure is marked by isolation in both films, whereas Kane retreats to Xanadu, Zuckerberg remains emotionally rather than physically detached. His social networking platform has united the world of non-space, and although he is constantly around others during the processes of the creation and running of Facebook, he rarely interacts with others and appears to find it difficult to do so.[744] Even when Zuckerberg moves to California, he surrounds himself with programmers—people like him—and yet their main activity is inherently isolating. Although Zuckerberg does not lock himself away in his own private Xanadu—or another detached location akin to Howard Hughes' screening room—there is a greater sense of his isolation towards the end of the film, being framed in a similar fashion to the protagonists of *Citizen Kane* and *The Aviator*. Shots of Zuckerberg alone in the offices of Facebook (Figure 3.39) and the offices of the law firm (Figure 3.40), rooms previously filled with co-workers and solicitors, point towards his mental seclusion, a psychological mechanism that alerts him to the fact that his loneliness results from his poor social relationships. There is, however, a romanticism implicit in the misunderstood genius, a lone figure often seen as special or unique, and these antiheroic character traits frequently elicit feelings of sympathy or admiration.

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[744] The scene at Zuckerberg's house in Palo Alto in which he attempts to be playfully casual by tossing Parker's friend Sharon (Emma Fitzpatrick) a bottle of beer is indicative of this failure, with the bottle impacting on the wall beside her. This is then comically compounded by the repetition of the act.

The success story and the American Dream

> *"Every rich man is not, by any means, truly successful;*
> *every poor man is not, by any means, unsuccessful."*
> - Francis Clark, founder of the Christian Endeavor Union [745]

In some parlances the terms "wealth" and "success" are used synonymously, but it is important to acknowledge the ambiguities that obfuscate and problematise this terminology. Richard Weiss' perceptive history of the collective striving for success in American culture, *The American Myth of Success*, is useful for considering how the success narrative in film relates to the prevalence and emphasis on success as an objective in American society. Weiss admits that there is a general problem in terms of providing a definition for success in any attempted cultural study: "Any student of the success myth encounters the seemingly insoluble dilemma of finding any consistent definition of success. At different times, it seems to mean virtue, money, happiness, or a combination of all three."[746] Furthermore, there are markedly different means for achieving success advocated by those who have written on the subject over the last two centuries of American culture; these vary from ethical maxims of behaviour in which ambition was considered sinful, to the suggestion that technical achievement stands against orderly, regulated development, instead becoming a "natural" (in an evolutionary sense), unsystematic, uncontrolled unleashing of energies.[747] Yet there is also an important distinction between action and motivation in relation to success, between doing and feeling and how this reflects

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[745] F.E. Clark, *Our Business Boys* (Boston: D. Lathrop and Co., 1884), p. 48.
[746] Richard Weiss, *The American Myth of Success: From Horatio Alger to Norman Vincent Peale* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1969), p. 15.
[747] Ibid., pp. 29-30.

the spirit of American business; as Weiss asserts, "In a society where money conferred social distinction as well as comfort, men tended to prize it above everything else."[748]

With these concepts in mind, it is interesting to note how Welles directly addresses the format of *Citizen Kane* as a success story:

> There have been many motion pictures and novels rigorously obeying the formula of the "success story." I wished to do something quite different. I wished to make a picture which might be called a "failure story." […] My story was not […] about how a man gets money, but what he does with his money—not when he gets old—but throughout his entire career.[749]

Welles identifies the film as a "failure story" rather than a "success story" due to the fact that the protagonist's $60 million fortune is inherited, and at such an age where his perception of money would be uncertain. The extent of this fortune refutes the potential dramatic impetus of earning more money, and therefore money is not a motivator for success. If the "success story" for Welles is about working up to a position of wealth and prominence (as opposed to moral betterment or succeeding in helping others), then the "failure story" would seem to be posited in opposition to this.[750] Seeing as Kane doesn't lose his wealth significantly over the course of the film, his failures instead derive from his futile expenditures, unsuccessful relationships, and misplaced power which compound his life of isolation, detachment and misery. By

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[748] Ibid., p. 39.

[749] Welles, 'Orson Welles on His Purpose in Making *Citizen Kane*', p. 24.

[750] In contrast, however, Morris Dickstein believes that *Kane* is an obvious example of the success narrative, albeit in a more questioning, investigative manner: "More than anything else *Citizen Kane* is a success story, made at the end of a decade that had sharply questioned the older American models of success and failure […] the backstage musicals, gangster films, tycoon films, and monster films, which imitate the pattern of Horatio Alger tales about the American Dream." See Morris Dickstein, 'The Last Film of the 1930s, or, Nothing Fails like Success', p. 87. The success stories of the 1930s were often more negative, cautionary tales rather than merely celebrations of accomplishment, evident in the downward trajectories of films such as *Little Caesar*, *The Public Enemy*, *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1933), *A Star Is Born* (1937), and *Golden Boy* (1939).

being thrust into wealth at the age of eight, Kane therefore has to attempt to justify

his fortune by transforming himself into a Great Man through the *application* of his

wealth rather than becoming one through social and monetary transgression, earning

his fortune through the familiar rags-to-riches narrative.

Citizen Kane presents its wealthy protagonist as a prodigious consumer, indicating his

level of excess, decadence, and waste: Xanadu is described in the "News on the

March" newsreel as containing "a collection of everything, so big it can never be

catalogued or appraised." Dennis Bingham states that few films of this era "actually

showed conspicuous consumption and its consequences, without either excusing or

condemning them."[751] The purpose of Kane's excessive and compulsive consumption

of goods is not to create a "living legacy," as Bingham puts it, but simply to be boxed

up and stored (or in the case of Rosebud, burned); the vast possessions of this Great

Man—what Mulvey astutely describes as "the detritus of European culture and

history"[752]—are therefore directly connected to his physical death, entirely removed

from the public world.

The Social Network creates a disparity in its concern with the thematic influence of

fortune and the role that money plays in its narrative, as the negation of presenting

public wealth problematises spectatorial engagement with both wealth and success. It

can be read as a film about business that accurately depicts start-up culture and the

founding mentality,[753] thus contrasting with concepts of business, money, and

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[751] Bingham, *Whose Lives Are They Anyway?*, p. 54.

[752] Mulvey, *Citizen Kane*, p. 15.

[753] Eduardo Saverin, having watched the film, said, "The true takeaway for me was that entrepreneurship and creativity, however complicated, difficult, or tortured to execute, are perhaps the

technology in other Great Man biopics. Of Scorsese's biopic of Howard Hughes, for

instance, Paul A. Cantor notes:

> The motif of "one's own money" runs throughout *The Aviator* and develops
> a moral dimension. [It implies that] as long as it is his own money that he is
> risking and he is willing to bear the consequences himself, he has the right
> to do so.[754]

This moral philosophy seems to be shared by Charles Foster Kane: on being told that

his business has been posting a loss he says, "You're right. I did lose a million dollars

last year. I expect to lose a million dollars *next* year. You know, Mr. Thatcher, at the

rate of a million dollars a year, I'll have to close this place in… 60 years." Kane shares

Hughes' sense of risk, with both figures having inherited fortunes and made

subsequent millions since then. In contrast, Mark Zuckerberg is not only unwilling to

risk his own money, he is not shown to possess any form of capital to begin with.[755]

Concurrently, despite neither investing nor spending his own money, Zuckerberg

wields his wealth as a threat, promising to "buy Mount Auburn Street, take the

Phoenix Club and turn it into my ping pong room." However, considering the

astronomical figures with which we are presented by the end of the film (the millions

of users that popularise Facebook, the advertising revenues coming from monetising

the business, the millions of dollars relinquished by Zuckerberg as part of the legal

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most important drivers of business today and the growth of our economy. While watching the
'Hollywood version' of one's college life is both humbling and entertaining, I hope that this film inspires
countless others to create and take that leap to start a new business. See Eduardo Saverin, 'Facebook
Co-Founder Speaks Publicly: What I Learned From Watching "The Social Network"', *CNBC.com* [Online],
15 October 2010. Available at:
http://www.cnbc.com/id/39675388/Facebook_Co_Founder_Speaks_Publicly_What_I_Learned_From_
Watching_The_Social_Network, accessed 22/07/11.

[754] Paul A. Cantor, 'Flying Solo: *The Aviator* and Libertarian Philosophy' in Mark T. Conrad (ed.), *The
Philosophy of Martin Scorsese*, p. 173.

[755] Facebook initially comes into existence as a company after he asks Saverin for a thousand dollars of
start-up capital and establishes business terms, and we are previously made aware that Saverin has
earned a substantial sum of money by betting on oil futures. Saverin later puts an additional $18,000
dollars in the account, but Zuckerberg's monetary input remains at zero.

settlements, and the statement of Zuckerberg's own personal fortune), it is worth noting that money is never physically depicted, bar a single cheque changing hands. Not only is this in line with Zuckerberg's conservative avoidance of the subject of money, but it also accurately portrays modern business practices in presenting abstract values on computer screens rather than depicting massive cash transfers or glimpsing vast amounts of money in safes or briefcases. Significantly, as mentioned before, the party held by Facebook at the end of the film is a celebration of their one-millionth member rather than their first million dollars.

With Facebook reaching a significant and unparalleled level of success, the characters correspond financially by dealing in stocks and shares, cheques and wire transfers. Yet these characters also don't spend extravagantly and thus we do not see the material gain of the influx of capital on this group of young people; instead we are able to see how the "concept" of money affects them and proves detrimental to their relationships. It appears that for the very wealthy, money becomes more difficult to understand. The lack of presentation of public wealth in *The Social Network* creates a dissonance from the material gains or financial rewards that typically derive from such success, and this unchanging status may cause the characters to appear more "grounded," and therefore more sympathetic. They are not automatically demonised as fickle characters compromised by their assertion of material superiority through ostentatious spending, instead remaining relatable because we are presented with no evidence of their extravagance; they do not spend all their money on fancy, expensive or purposeless objects, items that would openly express their success in material terms. The effect of this is the problematising of wealth due to the fact that financial

success is not equated with material expenditure in a conventional manner, such as Kane's vast acquisition of objects from all over the world to fill his enormous mansion.

However, there is also a further issue here that mystifies wealth: the success of the characters in *The Social Network* is derived from a website, what is in effect a virtual product. Unlike successful cinematic entrepreneurs who made their fortunes as champions of industry, from *The Power and the Glory* (1933), *Ruthless* (1948) and *The Fountainhead* (1949) to *The Aviator* and *There Will Be Blood*, men who create products and provide services, it is far less clear how exactly Facebook (or indeed the internet) is monetised.[756] There is a technological shift from a material base (such as Kane's newspaper empire) to computer hardware, software, and the internet, an invisible network of networks wherein Facebook resides.[757] The general uncertainty about the growth of Facebook and the company's fortunes deriving from online activities and virtual interactions extends to the notion that the money it generates is virtual: there is little sense of the material basis of money because Facebook is a virtual service rather than a physical product.

This relationship with money and the thematic influence of fortune in *The Social Network* has an interesting contrast with *Citizen Kane* in terms of how this relates to the concept of the Great Man in the biopic genre. When Thompson visits Bernstein,

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[756] We are often pointed towards advertising expenditure or website subscriptions as two explanations for the monetisation of the internet, but these two factors do not apply to Facebook (at least in the film) as Zuckerberg insists on remaining ad-free, saying, "We don't even know what it is yet. We don't know what it is. We don't know what it can be, we don't know what it will be. We know that it is cool, and that is a priceless asset I'm not giving up."

[757] Even during an earlier period of the same industry, there was a stress on selling computer hardware: *Pirates of Silicon Valley* (1999) interestingly depicts the battle between Bill Gates (Anthony Michael Hall) and Steve Jobs (Noah Wyle) to dominate the personal computer market in the 1980s and '90s.

Kane's personal business manager, Bernstein quips, "It's no trick to make a lot of money, if all you want… is to make a lot of money." The way in which fortunes are made in *The Social Network* seems to suggest that this desire or ability to make vast sums of money simply for the sake of doing so is no longer a tenable option. In contrast to money's traditional material basis in physical products (such as metal and wood), print media (newspapers and books), and construction (buildings, bridges, roads), in the current technocratic world of virtual products and services, making money is not necessarily the objective.[758]   This relates to the Great Man theory in terms of how a man is judged by his ambition and his success, and how this power is utilised (or measured) for decisive historical impact. Changing conditions of business may challenge the propensity for this figure to exist in a transformed, complex society—one of constant redefinition, uncertainty and rapid development—and thus the conditions for a particularly type of success, as well as their forms of expression, have changed emphases.

Rather than appreciating his money, its value to him and his efforts to accumulate it, Zuckerberg dismisses it and instead revels in his superior intellect, ingenuity, and the *status* his wealth his granted him: in his deposition in the Winklevoss case, he says to them, "If you guys were the inventors of Facebook you'd have invented Facebook." As opposed to challenging Zuckerberg's monopoly of Facebook, the Winklevosses are instead fighting against his monopoly on the wealth that resulted from the social networking platform, as the potential profits for proven intellectual copyright

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[758] It is worth noting, however, that Bernstein implies that this was not Kane's intention either, positioning him in opposition to his guardian, Walter Parks Thatcher (George Coulouris): "He knew what he wanted, Mr. Kane did, and he got it! Thatcher never did figure him out." In contrast, Bernstein describes Thatcher as a man who "never knew there was anything in the world *but* money."

infringement are extremely high. Money becomes an object of power, with status not

granted according to material possessions but simply through numerical figures: by the

end of the film Zuckerberg's fortune outweighs the Winklevosses' significantly, and

both lawsuits are filed because the prosecuting parties believe they are owed a portion

of the profits due to their particular investments. By this point, the sums of money

being mentioned are so large they lose all meaning or comparative value; in Saverin's

case, the details of the shares and percentages he has inadvertently forfeited remain

unclarified. For Kent Jones, *The Social Network* "addresses the wilful confusion

between business and visionary practice […] with which we've stuck ourselves for the

moment. And […] it identifies the potential for remoteness, distrust and ill will that a

generation has given itself as a gift."[759] In this reading, there are no heroes or villains,

winners or losers, just lonely people who believe they are right, or simply want more

money.

In general, money has a smaller attachment value for this group of young people

because they have money to begin with, as the majority of these characters are at

Harvard though the privilege enabled by their families. The depiction of this

"privileged" lifestyle for these young Americans is established at the very start of the

film, and the leisure of Harvard—the time and space to learn, to create, and to

establish oneself and one's ideas—is attained by being able to afford the attendance of

such a prestigious institution.[760] This relates to a discourse surrounding the relevance

of class, privilege and luck in the success narrative, but first it is important to

distinguish between the success story and the American Dream. Whereas the success

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[759] Jones, 'Only Connect'.

[760] As discussed previously, the providers of these finances—the parents—are never seen and only rarely mentioned.

story can be identified as a common feature of the biopic, the concept of the American

Dream is more concerned with ideology. J. Emmett Winn, defines the American

Dream as "a cherished belief in American society," a principle that "is entrenched in

American popular culture" of books, movies, TV shows, and music.[761] These cultural

artefacts "express the basic ideals of the American Dream and, in turn, continually

communicate it to a receptive audience," with these expressions very much tied to the

consideration of the nation as "the land of opportunity despite one's race, color,

creed, or national origin, an idea that is acknowledged in many parts of the world,

especially in America."[762] The biopic is a genre dominated by the white American or

European male, but this man can belong to various social classes, and the movement

across socially defined boundaries was a key motif of the traditional biopics of the

studio era. This is also of particular relevance when examining the quest for

acceptance and exclusivity undertaken by Zuckerberg in *The Social Network*, as it is the

tension between social strata and the movement across them that creates the drama

for the narrative.

According to Birdsall and Graham, "mobility is at the root of the American Dream,"[763]

therefore fundamentally indicating an ability to move upward through class levels. But

achieving the American Dream is also a project of bettering oneself, as Winn

elaborates:

> Mobility in the American Dream is about a person who elevates himself or
> herself as a result of hard work and individual endeavor. This mobility is
> not measured in strict economic terms, for it is about more than just money

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[761] Winn, *The American Dream and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, p. 1.

[762] Ibid.

[763] Nancy Birdsall and Carol Graham (eds.), *New Markets, New Opportunities? Economic and Social Mobility in a Changing World* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 1999), p. 195.

– it is about people making better lives for themselves. The dream is a move up, a positive change in social life, a better life.[764]

This is a key distinction from the success narrative, with an emphasis on social rather than financial gain; also implicit here is the notion that moral improvement is superior and preferable to monetary success. In short, money does not equal happiness, but positive change is a key factor for accomplishing a higher plane of gratification and satisfaction. The American Dream has a strong correlation to the rags-to-riches story, narratives which "communicate that success is the result of hard work and moral uprightness," and also "communicate to the viewers a heartening, encouraging, and healthy view of the Unites States as the land of the American Dream."[765] The concept is therefore both a resilient and flexible one that remains relevant in its very mutability, a paradigm somehow both classic and contemporary and viewed as achievable by different generations and social classes.

This is complicated, however, by the contemporary notion of the United States as, if not a non-classless society, then one less class-centric: Winn notes that, "on closer inspection, the American Dream is inherently indebted to an idea that social classes do not exist in a concrete way in the United States."[766] This lack of concreteness is central to the concept of the American Dream, as it can only exist within a free society unconstrained by such basic social limitations as class, colour, or race. One must acknowledge that while these boundaries are unfixed and ill-defined, they are also

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[764] Winn, *The American Dream and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, p. 2.

[765] Ibid., p. 41. In *The Social Network* the protagonist does not start in a state of poverty or dire requirement, the film begins *in medias res* at a point where he is studying at one of the most well-endowed and prestigious colleges in the world, a fact confirmed by Zuckerberg's condescending attitude to Erica studying at Boston University.

[766] Ibid., p. 3.

uncertain, subjective and subliminal. There is little doubt that there exist certain barriers to entry in many institutions and collective social groups across the United States, and it is precisely this form of impediment, these lines of exclusivity, that Zuckerberg is trying to surmount in *The Social Network*. Yet despite his aspirations, his creation is initially conceived as a highly exclusive social network, available only for Harvard students.[767] The subsequent domestic expansion and branching out of Facebook to other American colleges and academic institutions around the world is a gradual process, a measured breaking down of the social boundaries that exist in the virtual world of the internet.

Although Facebook allows Zuckerberg firstly to transgress and subsequently break down these social boundaries, he also has a focus on starting and running a successful and innovative business with little obvious regard for the financial profits that derive from this success. Zuckerberg appears to be turning his back on the conditions of "American success" that are conveyed by how much money he possesses, though others may judge his success according to these criteria considering he has an estimated current fortune of $16.8 billion.[768] And yet his arrogance is confirmed by his wealth, coming across as impatient and supercilious in the deposition scenes; this is evidenced by his comment about the ping pong room and his agreement with Marylin's suggestion that he pay off his accusers as "in the scheme of things it's a speeding ticket." The relationship between Facebook and Zuckerberg's trajectory

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[767] The exclusivity of the final clubs can be seen to be based on the elements of social class identity that are determined by a number of factors such as "economics, wealth, education and birth status, as well as lifestyle choices, cultural tastes, and social, secular, and religious affiliations," with these representing "widely varying markers of differentiation, markers that separate and label the individual" (ibid, p. 5).

[768] Bernice Napach, 'Facebook Surges and Mark Zuckerberg Pockets $3.8 Billion', *Yahoo! Finance* [Online], 26 July 2013. Available at: http://finance.yahoo.com/blogs/daily-ticker/facebook-surges-mark-zuckerberg-pockets-3-8-billion-143114560.html, accessed 29/10/13

regarding the American Dream is more complex: while he achieves upward mobility in terms of being recognised as both creator and visionary, he fails in regard to moral betterment or self-improvement, with the success of his company leading to the dissolution of his close friendship with Eduardo Saverin. The film is non-committal on whether this is a consequence of "good business" (considering that Saverin was not adequately fulfilling his duties as CFO) or if it was an act of duplicitous subterfuge, with Zuckerberg forcing him out of the company in favour of his new business partner, Sean Parker. Saverin was myopic about the direction of the company and so, unfairly or not, was forcefully removed from Facebook. As Zuckerberg does not strive to enhance himself in social terms—in spite of Facebook's aspiration to level the playing field of social mobility—he thus relinquishes his ability to accomplish the American Dream. However, Zuckerberg's unhappiness can be attributed to the fact that he has behaved according to the wrong principles: as Winn asserts, "The rhetorical moralising of values demonstrates that the wealthy may be unhappy or malevolent due to the fact that they adhere to the wrong values rather than due to their exploitation of others."[769] While this may not justify his actions, Zuckerberg's dream metamorphoses from a small project into a global product, connecting people but at the expense of his close personal relationships. As well as paying little heed to the billions of dollars that Facebook has generated, Zuckerberg seems to admit his own regret for how his success has had an injurious effect on his friendships with Eduardo Saverin and Erica Albright. At the end of the film, Zuckerberg—like Kane isolated in Xanadu—is left alone with his memories, still harbouring the aspiration that Facebook can act as a

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[769] Winn, *The American Dream and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, p. 41.

gateway for the restoration of a relationship, starting with his small gesture of friendship to Albright – a "friend request" no less.

W.R. Fisher argues that the American Dream is formed of two myths, the materialistic success myth and the moralistic myth of brotherhood: "the egalitarian moralistic myth of brotherhood [involves] the values of tolerance, charity, compassion and true regard for the dignity and worth of each and every individual"; the materialistic myth is concerned with "the puritan work ethic and relates to the values of effort, persistence, 'playing the game', initiative, self-reliance, achievement, and success."[770] Fisher demonstrates that these dual myths can, and do, support both the notion of upward mobility and the negation of social upbringing that forms the classless basis of the dream. In *The Social Network*, these dual myths are positioned in opposition, with Zuckerberg succeeding at one and failing at the other. His failure to fulfil the "moralistic myth of brotherhood" further underlines the impossibility of achieving the complete dream and explains his melancholic, despondent state at the film's conclusion. The irony lies in the fact that Zuckerberg achieves such a massive level of materialistic success but is unmotivated by a desire for greater wealth or power, and is therefore not corrupted by the immoral motives this desire may necessitate. The reason behind his individual and moral dissatisfaction lies in hubris and obstinacy, failing to experience a personal conversion in relearning the virtue of values which often derive from the moralising of failure that Winn discusses. While there are indubitably many structural obstacles to the American Dream, *The Social Network*

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[770] W.R. Fisher, 'Reaffirmation and Subversion of the American Dream' in *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 59:2 (1973), p. 161.

reaffirms the notion that success and failure are largely determined by the individual and the decisions they make in the course of their narrative journey.

In summary, the level of privilege experienced by the protagonists of *The Social Network* problematises the focal points of the American Dream, most notably the concept of social mobility given their already high social standing. Mark Zuckerberg makes his fortune through intellect and technological foresight but begins from a position of privilege, thus undermining the rags-to-riches trajectory of the narrative[771]; his tale is differentiated from those of the young, working-class protagonists that populate Horatio Alger novels, characters who struggled valiantly against poverty and adversity to gain both wealth and honour, the ultimate realisation of the American Dream. One element that is key to what has become known as the "Horatio Alger myth" is the key role that "pluck and luck" play in the rising social mobility and fortunes of his young protagonists, through providential accidents rather than through hard work and dedication.[772] Given the role that luck seems to have played in both the American success narrative and the American Dream—the inheritance of Kane's family fortune can be attributed to chance, for instance—it is notable that this conception has been mythologised to the extent that it is no longer considered a major feature of

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[771] Much like the figure of Hooper (Richard Dreyfuss) in *Jaws* (1975)—who, according to Peter Biskind, "is associated with technology rather than experience, inherited wealth rather than self-made sufficiency"—Zuckerberg is initially characterised by his privileged social position. His status as a wealthy, intelligent man is evoked through his attendance at the prestigious institution of Harvard and his disdain of nearby Boston University. See Peter Biskind, '*Jaws*: Between the teeth', *Jump Cut* 9 (1975), pp. 1-29.

[772] For instance, many of Alger's novels allude to the centrality of this theme through their titles, such as *Struggling Upward; or, Luke Larkin's Luck* (1868), *Lester's Luck* (1901), and *Joe's Luck; or Always Wide Awake* (1913). The role of luck in the Horatio Alger myth has been undervalued in favour of criticisms of the socially destructive qualities of Alger's messages about the merits of the individual and fair opportunity, and the maintaining of a racial pecking order while ignoring the tensions and harsh realities of the caste system (See Harlon L. Dalton, *Racial Healing: Confronting the Fear Between Blacks & Whites* [New York: Doubleday, 1995]).

accomplishing this goal, a mythology to be admired rather than believed, especially in contrast to a reality of diminished possibilities. American business and culture are so complex and structured that they may no longer provide the conditions for luck to take such a central role, or for brilliance to express itself so clearly through elements of fortune and chance.

In contrast to the figure of the talented, visionary Great Man who must overcome opposition with skill or luck, screenwriters Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski refer to *Man on the Moon*, a biopic of comedian Andy Kaufman, as "anti-Great Man" due to the manners by which they subvert the themes of success and the significance of the protagonist.[773] Similarly, Sorkin's script does not present Zuckerberg in the form of the Great Man so central to the American success biopic.[774] Driven entrepreneurs tend to possess a ruthless streak, a character trait that allows them to get to the heights of their profession and maintain control over their products but also enables them to be criticised—or vilified—more easily.[775] *The Social Network* seems intent on capturing

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[773] Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski, *Man on the Moon: Screenplay and Notes* (New York: Newmarket, 1999), p. 151. Alexander and Karaszewski have also written similarly unconventional biopics, such as *Ed Wood* and *The People vs. Larry Flynt*.

[774] While Ben Mezrich's source text is a similarly critical, though less objective account, David Kirkpatrick's book, *The Facebook Effect* – written with the consultation and approval of Zuckerberg – attempts to tell the other side of the story. Kirkpatrick sees Zuckerberg in this reverential light, as both Great Man and true American businessman: "Mark is the most impactful person of his generation. That is what we should be trying to understand: how someone so young could create something so important." Quoted in Joe Nocera, 'Capturing the Facebook Obsession', *The New York Times* [Online], 15 October 2010. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/16/business/16nocera.html, accessed 22/07/11.

[775] This tremendous hubristic impulse is similarly expressed in *Pirates of Silicon Valley* through the rivalry between Steve Jobs and Bill Gates as their companies (Apple Computer and the Microsoft Corporation) competed for the domination of the personal computer market. Having depicted the betrayals, deception, and obsessions of the warring factions during this creative and exciting period of technological advancements, the culminating argument between Jobs and Gates cements their ruthless qualities despite their admission that they took concepts and designs from Xerox, another major company based in Palo Alto: Gates says, "You and I are both like guys who had this rich neighbour—Xerox—that left the door open all the time, and you go sneaking in to steal a TV set. Only when you get there, you realise I got there first. I got the loot, Steve! And you're yelling, 'That's not fair. I wanted to try to steal it first.' You're too late." When Jobs retorts, "We're better than you are… We have better

the negative characteristics of the individuals involved in the creation of Facebook (not just Zuckerberg), and although the film elucidates and supports his role as a technological visionary, it both compromises his status as a Great Man, as a paragon of virtuous ambition, and questions whether or not this role can exist in the contemporary success narrative.

In its complex melding of classical themes and issues central to contemporary culture, *The Social Network* reveals larger patterns of meaning concerning power, privilege and the migration of society and communication from a real sphere to a virtual one. The film is reluctant to concern itself with Facebook itself as a concept or as a cultural product, instead focusing on the motivations for its creation and the subsequent aftermath of those involved in its success. By casting its eye on the dual social microcosms of Harvard University and the online global community, it is able to examine the borders and distinctions under which they operate, illustrating the disparities and dissonances at play; for Scott Foundas, the film's fundamental purpose is "to remind us that nothing in this life can turn a Zuckerberg into a Winklevoss."[776] In spite of Facebook's intention to make everything more open and accessible, as well as advancing social connection and interaction, Zuckerberg is himself constrained by prejudices which denote where one is positioned on the social strata, impairing his judgment and thus compromising his ability to achieve the status of a Great Man.

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stuff," Gates says, "You don't get it, Steve. That doesn't matter," emphasising his business superiority in the face of Apple's technological supremacy. Microsoft had a lucrative partnership with IBM who used Microsoft's operating systems in their own PCs, and in 1997 Apple joined forces with Microsoft to release new versions of Microsoft Office for the Macintosh, with Microsoft making a $150 million investment in non-voting Apple stock. Press release from Apple [Online], available at: http://www.apple.com/ca/press/1997/08/AppleMicrosoft.html, accessed 20/07/11.

[776] Foundas, 'Revenge of the Nerd'.

Conclusion

In an article on nostalgia in the digital age—an era in which "film" has become a vestigial word—Todd Kushigemachi notes a tension between the promise of digital and nostalgia for the past evident in Fincher's most recent films. Despite his progressive use of digital technologies and subtle application of visual effects, Kushigemachi sees his digitally-shot films (*Zodiac*, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* and *The Social Network*) as "obsessed with returning to the past," with digital used "to recreate the past and comment on both the passage of time and inevitably of death."[777] This connection between forward-looking technologies and backward-looking narratives can be traced back even further: in *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym notes that *Jurassic Park* (1993), *Titanic* (1997) and *Gladiator* suggest how "progress didn't cure nostalgia but exacerbated it,"[778] using CGI to reanimate the past by recreating ancient cities, raising a sunken ocean liner, and salvaging dinosaurs from extinction. Boym suggests that nostalgia refuses to "surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition,"[779] and Fincher's recreations of the past use digital technology to engage with this dialectic. The digital aspects of *The Social Network*'s internet aesthetic suggest that new technologies allow for the possibility of transforming or asserting one's identity in a new social environment, one in which certain paradigms have shifted, boundaries crossed, and social hierarchies inverted.

The narrative structure of *The Social Network* demonstrates its fascination with the past, tracing the origins of the digital revolution back to 2003, a time before Facebook

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[777] Todd Kushigemachi, 'Nostalgia Goes Digital: Turning Back Time in the Films of David Fincher', *Pop Matters* [Online], 11 October 2011. Available at: http://www.popmatters.com/pm/feature/144591-nostalgia-goes-digital-turning-back-time-in-the-films-of-david-finch/P0, accessed 29/10/13

[778] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. xiv.

[779] Ibid., p. xv.

had been conceived. The cultural phenomenon of Facebook necessitates that the story of its creation be a success story in spite of Zuckerberg's personal failure narrative, and its phenomenological status also denotes it as a product of its zeitgeist, very much of its time rather than ahead of it.[780] The genesis of the website is traced through flashbacks of deposition testimony with differing versions of the story proving largely incompatible accounts, and this desire to reverse time is juxtaposed with the digital age's focus on progress. By exploring this tension between time and technology, the film is also able to acknowledge the uncertainty of truth. Boym identifies nostalgia as a "defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals,"[781] and thus the flashback structure of *The Social Network* can be seen as a way of narrativising this impulse for returning to the past that is instigated by the uncomfortable acceleration of progress.

The collected observations concerning the biographical protagonist, narrative trajectories, and engagements with generic conventions in *The Social Network* can be related back to the earlier question of how the digital challenges traditional forms and views of the biopic. The film's style serves to push the spectatorial boundaries and provoke the viewer into a more direct response to the material. By depicting such recent (unfinished) events, there emerges an additional challenge to the idea of the verifiable: one might speculate that the depiction of events from the recent past is

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[780] This contrasts with "biopics of failure" in which the inventor or artist is not recognised for their foresight, ambition or influence due to their lack of initial success, and may only be credited at a much later point of their career or even posthumously. Examples include *Tucker: The Man and His Dream* (1988), about Preston Tucker's ambitious but failed attempts to produce a state-of-the-art automobile, and biopics about less well-known musicians, such as Charlie Parker (*Bird*, 1988), Glenn Gould (*Thirty Two Short Films About Glenn Gould*), Selena (*Selena*, 1997), Bobby Darin (*Beyond the Sea*, 2004), Ian Curtis (*Control*, 2007), Édith Piaf (*La Vie en Rose*, 2007) and Ian Dury (*Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll*).
[781] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p. xiv.

more likely to be closer to "the truth" given that they have yet to be clouded by the judgmental distancing of time, yet *The Social Network* underscores the notion that any subjective position will indelibly impact on the comprehension and memorialisation of a historical event. Contrary to the traditional sense of progress and continuity in linear developments of mythological figures in the biopic, *The Social Network* actively challenges this ideological template while utilising a similar mode of address. Zuckerberg does not become a better person, nor does the film offer with any certainty his motivations for starting Facebook, but the film's connection to recent history emphasises how the actions of conflation and compression are used to shape public history, a more causal connection to the event and its transmission. Concurrently, the recent turn to focusing on living subjects stresses both a renewed urgency granted to contemporary events and the digitally-enabled ability to record and memorialise them as such, demonstrating how the digital can be applied to present another mode of biographical narrative that retains its rhetorical effectiveness.

The Social Network, in dealing with the recent past, reflects not so much a rewriting of history but a refutation of it that makes it such an interesting expression of the current zeitgeist, of online media saturation of "personalities" instead of people, the augmented isolation of social networking, and what Kent Jones describes as "the comforting solitude of a computer screen."[782] In this, the film is more irreverent toward historical record than the majority of biopics, adopting what David Scott Diffrient describes as "an adversarial stance toward the hagiographic cult of

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[782] Jones, 'Only Connect'.

personality."[783]   While the use of temporal shifts allows the film to explore the indeterminate and incidental nature of Zuckerberg's success, the framing of events in the recent past encourages the spectator to question its representation of its biographical subject and evaluate for themselves the veracity of events being shown. Despite offering "a slice of intensified history,"[784] to paraphrase John Reed, several key historiographical ambiguities and concerns arise: those of selectivity and interpretation on the part of the historian (both social and individual), quantifying the accuracy or validity of the historical fact, and the nature and value of historical narrativity. Yet the increased emphasis on both immediacy and involvement serve as a provocation for a more active engagement with both the text and its subject, an engagement from which greater and more significant personal meaning can be derived.

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[783] Diffrient, 'Filming a Life in Fragments', p. 95.
[784] This is how John Reed described his historical account of the October Revolution, *Ten Days That Shook the World* (1919).

Conclusion

Historical pasts/digital futures

In the Introduction, I proposed that a renewed interest in the historical film prompts an enhanced analysis of how the genre is affected by technology in narrative and stylistic terms, and thus how the experience of history is constructed. I also questioned whether historical films can demonstrate an enhanced engagement with the past or simply alternate ways of constructing it. While I must acknowledge that the answer to this question can itself be extremely subjective and open to individual interpretation, particular forms of historical reassessment in contemporary American cinema can also reveal changes in the processes of filmmaking and making history. We have seen that these mediations may be overt and discernible—such as the strategies of *Public Enemies*—while others are more innocuous, as in the internet aesthetic of *The Social Network*. Aesthetic issues and technological deployments have become of great significance to historical cinema in a manner that moves away from issues of spectacle and CGI enhancements, and towards larger notions of historical perception, experience, and subjectivity. At the same time, audiences have developed an awareness both of how films are made and the presence of the screen itself.

This thesis has shown that digital technologies have had a dramatic yet often subliminal effect on how the past has been depicted, contributing to characteristic ways of stylising history and enhancing its potency for audiences. Each case study has provided a distinct example of the ways that aesthetic and narrative strategies have been deployed to contribute to an extended or intensified form of historical communication, staging, and realisation. These examples have also demonstrated the

multiplicity of both meaning and meaning construction. Another aim of this thesis was to develop a way of thinking about historical cinema by moving away from reductive conceptions about historical spectacle and verisimilitude towards a more flexible and nuanced understanding of how historical events and figures can be realised and communicated. Across my case studies, it has become apparent that this is a special, unified moment of film history, one that may be superseded or subsumed by alternate strategies for conveying the past. Throughout, there has been an effort to integrate an array of films over a range of genres and historical modes, and I have approached my case studies with a desire to incorporate the terminology and study of history into textual analysis. Finally, I have constructed a model that consists of three separate features: digital production practices, historical re-enactment, and dramatic license in the distortion or conflation of characters and events.

The use of digital cameras and effects to recreate historical events demonstrates a continued desire to look back rather than move forward. Whether this impulse is borne from nostalgia is debatable, but if nostalgia itself derives from the "irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition," as Svetlana Boym suggests, then the passing of time represents a direct confrontation with the inevitability of death. In *Death 24x a Second*, Laura Mulvey addresses the contemporary obsession with mortality in the digital age, suggesting that the fascination with pausing the moving image (perfected by digital home viewing technologies) is a shudder, "a symptom of the unconscious difficulty that the human mind has in grasping death and its compensatory capacity to imagine an afterlife."[785] This can, of course, conveniently be

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[785] Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second*, p. 32.

related to the "death of celluloid" and analogue nostalgia, but Mulvey's comments on

this impulse to pause the image suggest a cultural yearning to arrest time, to stop the

moving image from continuing to its natural end. Digital technologies have further

enabled filmmakers (and, subsequently, spectators) to work through the mystery of

mortality by depicting the events, lives, societies, cultural milieux, and technological

changes of the past that form popular historical narratives. Films like *Public Enemies*

and *The Social Network* use such indexical markers of time to relate the complexity of

history and remind the viewer that, in spite of digital technology's attempts to return

us to an immediate and definitive point in the past, the passage of time—and death

itself—is both inevitable and crucial to the formation of history.

In 'Digital Cinema: Delivery, Event, Time', Thomas Elsaesser presents a forceful

argument about the influence of new technologies:

> [T]he digital is not only a new technique of post-production work and a new
> delivery system or storage medium, it is the new horizon of thinking about
> cinema, which also means that it gives a vantage point from beyond the
> horizon, so that we can, as it were, try and look back to where we actually
> are and how we arrived there. The digital can thus function as a time
> machine, a conceptual boundary, as well as its threshold.[786]

While the digital can be seen as another step in the progressive stride of cinema, the

implementation and adoption of digital technologies has not led to a total alteration of

film production, distribution or exhibition. Filmmaking still relies on the capturing of

light, and film viewing is still dependent on the reception of image and sound. I see

these digital transitions as exemplifying dynamics of convergence rather than

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[786] Thomas Elsaesser, 'Digital Cinema: Delivery, Event, Time' in Elsaesser and Hoffman (eds.), *Cinema Futures: Cain, Abel or Cable?*, pp. 204-205.

divergence, bringing classical elements together in modern ways, and lending new aesthetic identities and possibilities. The expressive potential of digital filmmaking negotiated in this thesis points to it as a way forward for historical interpretation; as digital cinema shifts from its prototypical, nascent phase to a more totalising, industry-accepted form, we will be able to study its contribution to a diversification of historical and aesthetic representations in which the past is both re-constructed and engaged with in ways distinct from the traditional, classical forms.

The shift from celluloid to digital in the generic context of the historical film provokes numerous responses. Through these forms of remediation, digital technologies have encouraged a new vocabulary, a new terminology; the digitisation of an analogue past can be aligned with Anna Everett and John Caldwell's description of "digitextuality", in which "new media digital technologies not only by building a new text through absorption and transformation of other texts [i.e. the past], but also by embedding the entirety of other texts (analogue and digital) seamlessly within the new."[787] As we have seen, the decision to shoot a period film digitally can combine several different historical approaches, absorbing historical events and figures and transforming them into something more tangible and imposing in its physical and material values. In this regard, the term "digihistory" could be applied to describe this suturing of digital methods and effects to particular notions of history.

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[787] Anna Everett and John T. Caldwell, *New Media: Theories and Practices of Digitextuality* (New York & London: Routledge, 2003), p. 7. Their term "digitextuality" combines the digital with particular notions of intertextuality defined in Julia Kristeva's book, *Revelation in Poetic Language* (New York & Guildford: Columbia University Press, 1984).

While digital technologies are still noticeable in the formation of texts, the narratives themselves are more open and ambivalent about historical "realities", producing films that work through the contingencies, complexities, ambiguities and contradictions of history in a manner that encourages individual interpretation.[788] This greater level of engagement in a range of complex ways continues the traditions observed film historians such as Burgoyne, Toplin and Rosenstone by thinking of films as texts that allow for specific forms of historical engagement and which represent the societal and cultural contexts in which they were made. So while this thesis acknowledges the value of Rosenstone's assertion that good historical films not only "vision" the past but also "contest" and "revision" traditional historical thinking, I have also addressed ways in which film technologies and aesthetics shape the construction and understanding of new historical cinema.

On several occasions I have mentioned the "experience" of history as something that filmmakers wished to explicitly convey by capturing the past in such a way and relating this immediacy to audiences. There is a sense that the indefinable experiencing of the past is somehow bound up with a spectatorial desire or willingness to be immersed within a period diegesis. Moreover, the prompting of immediate experience is posited as contrary to the memorialisation of the past. The difficulty in finding a balance between the intentions of the filmmaker and the consensus regarding the effect of a film seems analogous with the inability to define or describe one's own experience of

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[788] Robert Brent Toplin's claim that, in the 1990s, Oliver Stone bucked contemporary trends by making films that "examine the dark side of American life and leave audiences uncomfortable" (Introduction to *Oliver Stone's USA*, p. 8) has perhaps extended outwards to other Hollywood filmmakers, enabled to some extent by technology and enhanced by changing political cultural climates. Operating against historical conservatism and American exceptionalism, recent historical cinema has instead sought to challenge and oppose dominant thinking or conventional historical narratives, conveying more oblique histories and focusing on atypical historical subjects.

viewing it. This "experience", I would argue, is a conglomeration of stylistic elements, narrative trajectories, interpretation on the part of the filmmakers, and audience perception, working together to perform a specific and direct account of historical events. The approach and methods of this thesis, therefore, have significance not only for those interested in historical cinema, but for historiography and film aesthetics more generally.

Future work: generic, transmedial and sensorial possibilities

This project has aimed to analyse the employment of particular aesthetic and representational strategies in a recent cycle of historical films in American cinema. Given the shifting playing field of film production and forms of historical engagement, it is intended to provide a base for further enquiry as digital filmmaking opens up new expressive possibilities. This study has also provided a way of accounting for the new ways in which audiences memorialise, recall and engage with the past, as well as the seemingly inexpressible resonances that historical texts can initiate.

In the Introduction, I mentioned the effect of nostalgia in the current phase of digital transition, and in the final chapter I produced a conception of nostalgia and immediacy as ways of exploring the tension between temporality and technology. This is not a restrictive, essentialist gesture, but one that I hope will allow for historical cinema to be understood in a new light. This does not necessarily need to be limited to one genre, but applies to any type of film that deals with memory, pastness or period contexts, allowing us to discover affinities and traits across less limited or prescriptive boundaries. This mode of transgeneric exploration could also be extended across

other media. While I have attempted to recognise and evaluate several important genres here, there are many more that remain unassessed, such as the war film, the Western, period literary adaptations, and several variations of the historical epic.[789]

My thesis has focused almost exclusively on American films about figures from American history, and made by American filmmakers. This was done for the purpose of providing a narrowly focused and uniform canon, but another fruitful avenue of research would encompass the histories of other nations and cultures.[790] One form this work might take would be the theorisation of new forms of national history as expressed by a variety of filmmakers (amateur and professional) and over a range of media. Is it possible to define national history in such a way? And how might minority views be linked to "mainstream" films, such as those discussed in this work? Robert Burgoyne has already embarked on a project in *The Epic Film in World Culture*, but forthcoming books such as Melvyn Stokes' *American History through Hollywood Film* and Kathryn Morey's *Bringing History to Life through Film* prove that America remains the focal point for the study of historical cinema. The pioneering work of Burgoyne and Rosenstone, as well as influencing my own study, demonstrates the potential for research within the fields of global historical cinema, minority cultures and non-mainstream filmmakers. My case studies have come largely from mainstream American cinema,[791] though their distinct and progressive formal characteristics have frequently been influenced by contemporary arthouse cinema, such as the Dogme

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[789] For instance, films such as *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* and *Blackthorn* (2011) would provide an interesting account of the historicisation (or periodisation) of the Western, incorporating notions of iconography and mythology into this study.

[790] Ridley Scott's *Robin Hood* (2010) and Ben Wheatley's *A Field in England* (2013), for instance, would serve as separate case studies for the reassessment of English history.

[791] I hesitate, with good cause, in saying "Hollywood" here.

movement, or more experimental efforts.   This area is deserving of concentrated critical analysis; a similar project has recently been undertaken by Tom Brown and Belén Vidal in their edited collection, *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*.   Much of this work discusses the biographical film predominantly in terms of its generic, aesthetic and cultural significance, examining the global reach and effects of the genre.

The central and perhaps most glaringly obvious omission from this study is a consideration of another major technological form that has evolved alongside digital cinema in recent years: 3D.   I stated in Chapter One how I was eager to move beyond studies of how digital effects have altered production strategies and visual elements of the historical film, and while 3D cinema fits more neatly into this academic field, this study has intentionally overlooked how 3D can function as another representational strategy for depicting the past, in large part due to the lack of suitable case studies for 3D historical films.[792]

In this study I have endeavoured to consider the historical film in relation to its effects on the revaluation or reassessment of history itself.   However, given the noticeable concentration on digital filmmaking, there is a capacious area in which one could consider additional elements of the digital.   One might take a sensory approach to the historical film, for instance, such as a consideration of the texture or tactility of period aesthetics which could take the form of a fully-fledged study of its own.   This could explore these complex dynamics, building on work by Jennifer Barker, Laura Marks and

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[792] In general, those that have been released have either been documentaries (*Cave of Forgotten Dreams*, 2010) or overly fantastical accounts (*Beowulf*, 2007; *Hugo*, 2011). Also of note is the return of the biblical epic, a genre whose status as part of historical cinema is more complex, with two 3D films due for release in 2014 (*Noah* and *Exodus: Gods and Kings*).

Gilberto Perez.[793] Most pertinently, while I have presented an encompassing characterisation of modern forms of historical reassessment in American cinema, more work needs to be conducted at a later date to examine in greater detail the wider applications and repercussions that have and will continue to emerge during this significant period of technological and stylistic transition. For instance, the release of two Steve Jobs biopics (indie movie *Jobs* [2013] and an as-yet untitled Aaron Sorkin-scripted studio film to follow in 2014) will provide both interesting counterpoints to my work on *The Social Network* and the modern biopic, and can also be contrasted against each other in their depictions of recent history. Although Jobs is a more conventional inventor/genius figure than Zuckerberg, the approaches the films take to his life, the way in which they depict technological progress, and what they include or omit from biographical accounts will certainly prove fascinating. This is an exciting period for historical cinema, and the many constituents of the genre will continue to challenge, provoke and surprise as digital practices become more refined and better integrated within the creative historical process.

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[793] See Jennifer M. Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), and Gilberto Perez, *The Material Ghost: Films and their Medium*.

Afterword

A new direction for historical cinema?

The merits and pitfalls of new historical cinema came to a head in 2012 and 2013, with continuing debates about the value and availability of documented material, the incursions of dramatic license and narrative conflation, and much finger-pointing regarding historical omissions and anachronisms. Films such as *Argo*, *Lincoln* and *Zero Dark Thirty* (all 2012) were each met with some degree of controversy,[794] largely due to the political implications of these stories: *Lincoln* focuses on the measures taken by Abraham Lincoln (Daniel Day-Lewis) to pass the 13th Amendment before the end of the American Civil War in 1865, in turn revealing the historical complexities of leadership; *Argo* declares itself as a dramatisation "based on the declassified true story" of the rescue of six US diplomats from the Canadian embassy in Tehran in 1979-80; *Zero Dark Thirty* depicts the American forces' hunt for Osama bin Laden by evaluating the methods and morals of the operation, while also addressing how we recount recent history. Together, these films present American history in cinematic and critical ways that question traditional forms of representation as well as the nature of US politics.[795] Each of these films has been criticised for political fictionalisation or having particular historical agendas.[796]

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[794] Some may ascribe this to the recent tendency within the industry for unsubtle, self-serving award campaigning that picks faults and creates controversy through criticising other films. See Tim Walker, 'Lincoln vs Argo and the big-budget blitz: how Hollywood is throwing millions at race for Best Picture Oscar', *The Independent* [Online], 17 February 2013. Available at: http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/lincoln-vs-argo-and-the-bigbudget-blitz-how-hollywood-is-throwing-millions-at-race-for-best-picture-oscar-8498744.html, accessed 07/10/13.

[795] Interestingly, both *Lincoln* and *Zero Dark Thirty* had their release dates pushed back to after the 2012 United States presidential election to avoid these accusations of political propaganda, though they were also positioned more centrally in awards season.

[796] For *Argo*, see Brian D. Johnson, 'Ben Affleck rewrites history', *Macleans* [Online], 12 September 2012. Available at: http://www2.macleans.ca/2012/09/12/ben-affleck-rewrites-history/, accessed 07/10/13.

On the one hand, there is the sense that America (and American audiences) has become more politically enlightened and open to a level of historical debate over such issues; A.O. Scott and Manohla Dargis note the presence of an "Obama-inflected Hollywood cinema"[797] (using a phrase borrowed from J. Hoberman) in films such as *The Help* (2011) and *Django Unchained* (2012), as well as *Lincoln* and *Zero Dark Thirty*. These films deal with issues such as race, war, nation, mythology and economics, as well as topically resonant political and historical matters. On the other hand, this demonstrates the importance of filmmaking as a form of personal and critical expression, a means of exploring, examining and representing historical figures and events in a manner that creates debate, discussion and, inevitably, controversy. There continue to be as many advocates of historical and factual accuracy as there are those who demand freedom of expression or advocate dramatic license, but recent films have shed light on the present importance of history, both distant and recent. In response to Connecticut congressman Joe Courtney's accusation of the film's false

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For Lincoln, see Eric Foner, 'Lincoln's Use of Politics for Noble Ends', *The New York Times* [Online], 26 November 2012 (available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/27/opinion/lincolns-use-of-politics-for-noble-ends.html, accessed 07/10/13), and Kate Masur, 'In Spielberg's "Lincoln," Passive Black Characters', *The New York Times* [Online], 12 November 2012 (available at: www.nytimes.com/2012/11/13/opinion/in-spielbergs-lincoln-passive-black-characters.html, accessed 07/10/13). For *Zero Dark Thirty*, see Roger Cohen, 'Why "Zero Dark Thirty" Works', *The New York Times* [Online], 11 February 2013 (available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/12/opinion/global/roger-cohen-why-zero-dark-thirty-works.html, accessed 07/10/13), Jane Mayer, 'Zero Conscience in "Zero Dark Thirty"', *The New Yorker* [Online], 14 December 2012 (available at: www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/newsdesk/2012/12/torture-in-kathryn-bigelows-zero-dark-thirty.html, accessed 07/10/13), and G. Roger Denson, '*Zero Dark Thirty* Account of Torture Verified by Media Record of Legislators and CIA Officials', *The Huffington Post* [Online], 31 December 2012 (available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/g-roger-denson/zero-dark-thirty-torture-scenes_b_2379609.html, accessed 07/10/13).

[797] A.O. Scott and Manohla Dargis, 'Movies in the Age of Obama', *The New York Times* [Online], 16 January 2013. Available at: www.nytimes.com/2013/01/20/movies/lincoln-django-unchained-and-an-obama-inflected-cinema.html, accessed 07/10/13. J. Hoberman, 'A New Obama Cinema?' *The New York Review of Books* [Online], 11 February 2012. Available at: http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2012/feb/11/new-obama-cinema-clint-eastwood-halftime/, accessed 07/10/13.

history tarnishing the representation of his state,[798] *Lincoln* writer Tony Kushner

responded by stating that changes were made to clarify the historical reality for the

audience—getting to the essence of the fact—while also defending his use of artistic

license to build suspense and the film itself as a work of historical drama.[799] Kushner

states:

> I respectfully disagree with the congressman's contention that accuracy in
> every detail is "paramount" in a work of historical drama. Accuracy is
> paramount in every detail of a work of history. Here's my rule: Ask yourself,
> "Did this thing happen?" If the answer is yes, then it's historical. Then ask,
> "Did this thing happen precisely this way?" If the answer is yes, then it's
> history; if the answer is no, not precisely this way, then it's historical
> drama.[800]

This adherence to key moments of the overarching story remains an essential part of

the historical film. Beyond that, however, the distinctions between history and

historical fiction have become increasingly permeable, as the act of providing a sense

of the experience of the past—often focusing on specific characters or providing

greater context—has become a key trope of historical cinema. Recent historical films

demonstrate how a range of filmmakers have revised and re-visioned conventional,

linear historical narratives to draw out their compelling and vital relevance to current

issues and events.

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[798] Specifically, Courtney referred to the fact that, in the film, two representatives from Connecticut vote "no" in the roll-call vote on the 13th Amendment, whereas in actuality Connecticut's four representatives all voted in its favour.

[799] Michael Carlson succinctly describes the paradox of this approach: "we need to indulge artistic license, but we also need to understand misrepresentation, when said distortion has a point." See Michael Carlson, '*Lincoln*, Part II: The Movies and the Facts', *Irresistible Targets* [Online], 27 February 2013. Available at: http://irresistibletargets.blogspot.co.uk/2013/02/lincoln-part-ii-movies-and-facts.html, accessed 07/10/13.

[800] Quoted in Melena Ryzik, 'Mr. Spielberg, Connecticut Objects!', *The New York Times* [Online], 07 February 2013. Available at: http://carpetbagger.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/02/07/mr-spielberg-connecticut-objects/, accessed 07/10/13.

Lincoln, as the title would suggest, is more concerned with the President, his actions, his influence and his legacy than it is about the subject of slavery. Moreover, it primarily deals with the attempts of Lincoln's government to persuade (white) men to free the slaves rather than the issue of (black) equality. Focusing on a specific point in Lincoln's presidency, it portrays the man as a shrewd politician who manipulates others in order to manoeuvre his way through the system—a somewhat dubious policy of compromise—for the purpose of achieving a moral end: "I can't accomplish a goddamn thing of any worth until we cure ourselves of slavery and end this pestilential war!" he exclaims. Following recent, high-profile incidents of gun violence in the United States, such as the Oikos University shooting, the 2011 Tucson shooting, and the 2012 Aurora shooting during a midnight screening of *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012), President Obama appeared to be confronted with a similar Constitutional dilemma. Yet the campaign for 19th century racial equality has additional parallels to current affairs of gender equality (gay marriage), modern forms of slavery (forced labour, sweatshops), national divides (partisan politics), and contemporary race relations (racial and ethnic discrimination) in the United States. As David Thomson notes, "*Lincoln* is especially momentous as the second Obama administration realizes there is no peace for the elected."[801] In avoiding being "a beatification, hallowed, saintly" in its approach to its subject, it becomes, for Thomson, "necessary" in its understanding of

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[801] David Thomson, 'Spielberg's Lincoln is a Film for our Political Moment', *The New Republic* [Online], 13 November 2012. Available at: http://www.newrepublic.com/article/books-and-arts/110113/spielbergs-lincoln-film-our-political-moment, accessed 07/10/13. For more on contemporary debates about Steven Spielberg as Hollywood historian, see Philip Zelikow, 'Steven Spielberg, Historian', *The New York Times* [Online], 29 November 2012 (available at: http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/11/29/steven-spielberg-historian/, accessed 07/10/13), and Tom Carson and Matt Zoller Seitz, 'Steven Spielberg, Hollywood Historian: A Debate Between Matt Zoller Seitz and Tom Carson', *Indiewire* [Online], 19 March 2013 (available at: http://blogs.indiewire.com/pressplay/steven-spielberg-hollywood-historian-a-debate-between-matt-zoller-seitz-and-tom-carson, accessed 07/10/13).

the past and its ability to relate it to our present.[802] As with *Thirteen Days* (2000), a dramatisation of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, it also reminds us of the fine line that separates what happened from what might have happened, the historical from the hypothetical.

Both *Lincoln* and *Zero Dark Thirty* are meditative procedurals about ideas, political ideologies, and the people who both craft and enforce them. Of the depiction of the recent past, Nicholas Rombes asserts that in *Zero Dark Thirty*, "history has become extreme, excessive, pathological, something no longer controlled by the smooth narratives deployed to make it understandable. History as a zero, in all its absence that leaves nothing but consequences, traces, its very shape an infinite loop."[803] But he also points up the fact that the film merely depicts a "version" of history, a narrative centred around one CIA officer, Maya (Jessica Chastain). Despite this focus, the film retains a firmly objective stance, one that details military strategy and complex procedure rather than exploring the geopolitical context surrounding the search for bin Laden. Rombes sees this as the "psychologizing [of] history rather than individuals," thereby eschewing a memorialisation of the past in favour of the presentation of events.[804] This is further conveyed through a lack of character psychology and the decision not to explore motivations. As Rombes notes, when confronted by a nasty truth, such as when George (Mark Strong) tells his CIA team, "Do your fucking jobs – bring me people to kill," the film demonstrates how motives work

[802] Thomson, 'Spielberg's Lincoln is a Film for our Political Moment'.
[803] Nicholas Rombes, '*Zero Dark Thirty* and the New History', *Filmmaker Magazine* [Online], 29 January 2013. Available at: http://filmmakermagazine.com/64175-zero-dark-thirty-and-the-new-history/, accessed 07/10/13.
[804] Ibid. I avoid the term "facts" here, given the controversy about the film's disclaimer of being "based on first-hand accounts," the secrecy surrounding the majority of the official documentation, and the fine line the film treads between historical accuracy and dramatic license.

in the service of history. Such a stance both implicates the audience in the actions of the narrative while also forcing viewers to decide for themselves what is right or wrong.

For Rombes, the absence of deep history in the film means that history itself "remains an ever-present but invisible force, too large to see, to grasp."[805] It is this "invisibility" of history that is most fascinating, a key factor at the heart of new historical cinema that flattens our perspective of time, and which has prompted the investigations of this thesis.[806] Recent films that deal with the past have explored history—its events, figures, ideologies and impacts—through a plethora of methods and techniques, but what is most striking is both the proliferation and creativity of oblique approaches, the ways of getting around history in order to get to the core of what filmmakers wish to communicate. Films such as *Che*, *W.* and *Zero Dark Thirty* all fit this description, as do other more apparently "conventional" films such as *Lincoln* and *The Conspirator* (2010). Rombes believes that some historical narratives and figures are too dangerous—and, I would add, often too familiar—to be related in a direct way, stating: "such histories can only be approached in an administrative, almost bureaucratic fashion, and in such a way that suggests history remains, at the end of the day, a tangle of zero-sum stories, usually competing with each other for legitimacy."[807] This

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[805] Ibid.

[806] In the case of *Zero Dark Thirty*, the historical context is more self-evident and implicitly vague than other recent combat films such as *Black Hawk Down* (2001), *Saving Private Ryan*, *The Patriot* (2000), and *Pearl Harbor* (2001). McCrisken and Pepper identify this cycle of films as one that includes "celebrate history, and in particular war and violence, as 'consumable spectacle'" (McCrisken and Pepper, *American History and Contemporary Hollywood Film,* p. 189). However, while these writers argue that the historical cinema of that period privileged sensation and spectacle over critical historical enquiry, I contend that digital technologies have enabled historical sensation and spectacle to be realised as part of a film's more disparate and ambivalent level of critical discourse – ways of contesting and revisioning the past, in Rosenstone's terms.

[807] Rombes, '*Zero Dark Thirty* and the New History'.

issue is explored in *Zero Dark Thirty*, with Maya referring to the potential locations of bin Laden as two separate "narratives" rather than "theories". As I have previously noted, Rombes' description can apply to some recent historical films, but there are additional ways of relating history that strive for neither objectivity nor definition.

In contrast to postmodernist visionings of the past—from *Chinatown* (1974) to *Inglourious Basterds* (2009)—which channel history through the filters of parody, pastiche and nostalgia, *Zero Dark Thirty* is emblematic of a different mode of historical depiction, an example of pathological, oblique and indirect forms of cinematic history. Yet the reason for these tropes, and indeed its history's apparent invisibility, is largely due to the fact that the film is set in the recent past, depicting a period so close to our present yet obscured by the lack of clarity and corroboration surrounding these events. Moreover, the consequences of these actions—in the long-term—remain uncertain. By situating events at this point, the film "avoid[s] arousing the attention of history" by suggesting that "we are not shapers of history, but rather shaped by it."[808]

As Kushner's response suggests, filmmakers continue to theorise themselves as historians while maintaining a critical and artistic distance from history itself. Burgoyne points out that American history has become an increasingly "contested domain in which narratives of people excluded from traditional accounts have begun to be articulated in a complex dialogue with the dominant tradition."[809] This recent

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[808] Ibid. This is further emphasised by the film's alignment with a character whose individual psychology and background is not explored, an absence of private history that augments the film's more general lack of engagement with public history and therefore moral ambiguity. This dynamic leads Rombes to state that, in the film, "it is *history itself* that is psychotic," thus resulting in the indistinct shape of its historical narrative.

[809] Robert Burgoyne, *Film Nation*, p. 1.

wave of historical cinema supports this view, but it also acknowledges both the benefits and impairments of these forms of expression. For instance, Hollywood's recent engagement with the subject and consequences of slavery can be seen to support Burgoyne's belief that contemporary filmmakers have come to articulate "a counter-narrative of American history" in order to assert "the increasingly hybrid and poly-cultural reality of American life."[810] In 2013, Steve McQueen's film *12 Years a Slave*—an account of a freeman, Solomon Northup (Chiwetel Ejiofor), who was sold into slavery—provoked controversy and criticism due to its visceral, confrontational imagery and unflinching depiction of violence. Ejiofor and co-star Michael Fassbender both elucidated the film's stance and their fidelity to documented history, emphasising their roles as facilitators. Ejiofor added: "To not show it as explicitly as we can would I think be a disservice to [Northup] and his family. What's the point in telling the story if we couldn't tell the story?"[811] Instead of pointing to potential areas of change, fixating on revenge, or lecturing the viewer, the film remains objective in its portrayal of slavery, allowing the actions and inactions of its characters to convey their own messages. This recent group of films suggests that not only are traditional questions of historical representation, accuracy and accountability still relevant, but new, multifarious discourses continue to emerge as a result of specific aesthetic, narrative and representational approaches.

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[810] Ibid., p. 2. Hollywood's engagement with slavery has been understandably limited given the complexities involved. Historical cinema—and, more generally, Hollywood—tends to be affirmative of cultural and political ideals, thus meaning that slavery has virtually been eradicated as topic of filmmakers' interest, with the exception of 'serious' historical films such as *Amistad* (1997) and *Lincoln*, and exploitation films such as *Mandingo* (1975) and *Django Unchained*. The shift to a more historically-conscious representation of slavery in the last few years can be attributed to an increased awareness of concepts of nation, gender, race and class—especially in a historical context—in contemporary culture.

[811] Quoted in Catherine Shoard, 'Steve McQueen on 12 Years a Slave: "It's not about sugarcoating history"', *The Guardian* [Online], 08 September 2013. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/sep/08/12-years-a-slave-steve-mcqueen, accessed 07/10/13.

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Eijanaika/Why Not?/ええじゃないか. Dir. Shôhei Imamura, Prod. Imamura Productions/Shôchiku Eiga, Japan, 1981.

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Fight Club. Dir. David Fincher, Prod. 20th Century Fox, USA, 1999.

The Fighter. Dir. David O. Russell, Prod. Paramount Pictures/The Weinstein Company, USA, 2010.

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The French Connection. Dir. William Friedkin, Prod. 20th Century Fox, USA, 1971.

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Gainsbourg. Dir. Joann Sfar, Prod. Universal Pictures, France/UK, 2010.

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Gladiator. Dir. Ridley Scott, Prod. DreamWorks Pictures/Universal Pictures, UK/USA, 2000.

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Heat. Dir. Michael Mann, Prod. Warner Bros., USA, 1995.

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The Help. Dir. Tate Taylor, Prod. 1492 Pictures/Harbinger Pictures, USA/India/United Arab Emirates, 2011.

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Hitchcock. Dir. Sacha Gervasi, Prod. Fox Searchlight Pictures, USA, 2012.

Hitler: A Film from Germany/Hitler - ein Film aus Deutschland. Dir. Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, Prod. TMS Film GmbH, West Germany/France/UK, 1977.

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Hoodlum. Dir. Bill Duke, Prod. MGM, USA, 1997.

House of Cards. Prod. Netflix, USA, 2013—.

Hugo. Dir. Martin Scorsese, Prod. Paramount Pictures/GK Films/Infinitum Nihil, USA, 2011.

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Ice Station Zebra. Dir. John Sturges, Prod. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, USA, 1968.

In the Year of the Pig. Dir. Emile de Antonio, Prod. Emile de Antonio Productions/Turin Film Productions, USA, 1968.

The Informant! Dir. Steven Soderbergh, Prod. Warner Bros., USA, 2009.

Inglourious Basterds. Dir. Quentin Tarantino, Prod. A Band Apart/Zehnte Babelsberg, USA/Germany, 2009.

Inland Empire. Dir. David Lynch, Prod. Absurda/StudioCanal, France/Poland/USA, 2006.

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JFK. Dir. Oliver Stone, Prod. Le Studio Canal+/Regency Enterprises, USA, 1991.

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Johnny Mnemonic. Dir. Robert Longo, Prod. TriStar Pictures, Canada/USA, 1995.

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Jurassic Park III. Dir. Joe Johnston, Prod. Universal Pictures, USA, 2001.

K Street. Prod. Section Eight/Sennet-Gernstein Entertainment, USA, 2003.

Kafka. Dir. Steven Soderbergh, Prod. Baltimore Pictures/Pricel/Renn Productions, France/USA, 1991.

King Kong. Dir. Peter Jackson, Prod. Universal Pictures, New Zealand/USA, 2005.

L.A. Confidential. Dir. Curtis Hanson, Prod. Warner Bros., USA, 1997.

Lansky. Dir. John McNaughton, Prod. HBO, USA, 1999.

Last Man Standing. Dir. Walter Hill, Prod. New Line Cinema, USA, 1996.

Lawless. Dir. John Hillcoat, Prod. The Weinstein Company, USA, 2012.

The Life of Emile Zola. Dir. William Dieterle, Prod. Warner Bros., USA, 1937.

Lincoln. Dir. Steven Spielberg, Prod. Amblin Entertainment/The Kennedy Marshall Company, USA, 2012.

Little Caesar. Dir. Mervyn LeRoy, Prod. Warner Bros., USA, 1931.

The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring. Dir. Peter Jackson, Prod. New Line Cinema, New Zealand/UK/USA, 2001.

The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King. Dir. Peter Jackson, Prod. New Line Cinema, New Zealand/UK/USA, 2003.

The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers. Dir. Peter Jackson, Prod. New Line Cinema, New Zealand/UK/USA, 2002.

The Lost Capone (John Gray, 1990)

The Lost World: Jurassic Park. Dir. Steven Spielberg, Prod. Universal Pictures, USA, 1997.

Love Me or Leave Me. Dir. Charles Vidor, Prod. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, USA, 1955

Lucky Luciano. Dir. Francesco Rosi, Prod. AVCO Embassy Pictures, USA, 1973.

Machine Gun Kelly. Dir. Roger Corman, Prod. Allied Artists, USA, 1958.

Magic Mike. Dir. Steven Soderbergh, Prod. Iron Horse Entertainment/Extension 765, USA, 2012.

Malcolm X. Dir. Spike Lee, Prod. 40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks, USA, 1992.

Man on the Moon. Dir. Miloš Forman, Prod. Universal Pictures, USA, 1999.

Mandingo. Dir. Richard Fleischer, Prod. Dino De Laurentiis Company/Paramount Pictures, USA, 1975.

Manhattan Melodrama. Dir. W.S. Van Dyke, Prod. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, USA, 1934.

Marie Antoinette. Dir. Sofia Coppola, Prod. Columbia Pictures, USA/France/Japan, 2006.

The Mark of Zorro. Dir. Fred Niblo, Prod. United Artists, USA, 1920.

Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World. Dir. Peter Weir, Prod. Samuel Goldwyn Films, USA/Australia/UK, 2003.

The Matrix. Dir. Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski, Prod. Warner Bros., USA/Australia, 1999.

The Matrix Reloaded. Dir. Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski, Prod. Warner Bros., USA/Australia, 2003.

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McCabe & Mrs. Miller. Dir. Robert Altman, Prod. Warner Bros., USA, 1971.

Memories of Underdevelopment/Memorias del subdesarrollo. Dir. Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Prod. Cuban State Film/ICAIC, Cuba, 1968.

Miami Vice. Dir. Michael Mann, Prod. Universal Pictures, USA, 2006.

Middle Men. Dir. George Gallo, Prod. Paramount Vantage, USA, 2010.

Milk. Dir. Gus Van Sant, Prod. Focus Features, USA, 2008.

Miller's Crossing. Dir. Joel Coen, Prod. 20th Century Fox, USA, 1990.

Miss Lonelyhearts/Advice to the Lovelorn. Dir. Alfred L. Werker, Prod. 20th Century Pictures, USA, 1933.

Mobsters. Dir. Michael Karbelnikoff, Prod. Universal Pictures, USA, 1991.

The Moderns. Dir. Alan Rudolph, Prod. Nelson Entertainment, USA, 1988.

The Motorcycle Diaries/Diarios de motocicleta. Dir. Walter Salles, Prod. Focus Features, Argentina, 2004.

Mr. Deeds Goes to Town. Dir. Frank Capra, Prod. Columbia Pictures, USA, 1936.

My Week with Marilyn. Dir. Simon Curtis, Prod. BBC Films/The Weinstein Company, UK. 2011.

Napoléon. Dir. Abel Gance, Prod. Ciné France Films/Films Abel Gance/Isepa-Wengeroff Film GmbH/Pathé Consortium Cinéma/Société générale des films, France, 1927.

The Net. Dir. Irwin Winkler, Prod. Columbia Pictures, USA, 1995.

The New World. Dir. Terrence Malick, Prod. New Line Cinema, UK/USA, 2005.

The Newton Boys. Dir. Richard Linklater, Prod. 20th Century Fox, USA, 1998.

The Night of the Shooting Stars/La notte di San Lorenzo. Dir. Paolo Taviani and Vittorio Taviani, Prod. RAI/Ager Cinematografica, Italy, 1982.

9 Songs. Dir. Michael Winterbottom, Prod. Revolution Films, UK, 2004.

Noah. Dir. Darren Aronofsky, Prod. Protozoa Pictures/Disruption Entertainment, USA, 2014.

October: Ten Days That Shook the World/ Октябрь (Десять дней, которые потрясли мир). Dir. Grigori Aleksandrov/Sergei Eisenstein, Prod. Sovkino, Soviet Union, 1928.

127 Hours. Dir. Danny Boyle, Prod. Fox Searchlight Pictures/Pathé, UK/USA, 2010.

Oscar. Dir. John Landis, Prod. Touchstone Pictures, USA, 1991.

The Outlaw. Dir. Howard Hughes, Prod. Howard Hughes Prod., USA, 1943.

Panic Room. Dir. David Fincher, Prod. Columbia Pictures, USA, 2002.

The Patriot. Dir. Roland Emmerich, Prod. Columbia Pictures Corporation/Centropolis Entertainment/Mutual Film Company/Global Entertainment Productions GmbH & Company Medien KG, Germany/USA, 2000.

Patton. Dir. Franklin J. Schaffner, Prod. 20th Century Fox, USA, 1970.

Pearl Harbor. Dir. Michael Bay, Prod. Touchstone Pictures/Jerry Bruckheimer Films, USA, 2001.

Pedro. Dir. Nick Oceano, Prod. Wolfe Video, USA, 2008.

The People vs. Larry Flynt. Dir. Miloš Forman, Prod. Columbia Pictures, USA, 1996.

The Permanent Way [stage play]. Written by David Hare, 2003.

Phil Spector. Dir. David Mamet, Prod. HBO Films, USA, 2013.

The Philadelphia Story. Dir. George Cukor, Prod. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, USA, 1940)

Pirates of Silicon Valley. Dir. Martyn Burke, Prod. Turner Network Television, USA, 1999.

Pocahontas. Dir. Mike Gabriel, Eric Goldberg, Prod. Walt Disney Pictures, USA, 1995.

Pocahontas and John Smith. Dir. Bryan Foy, Prod. Universal Pictures, USA, 1924.

Pocahontas: The Legend. Dir. Danièle J. Suissa, Prod. Protocol Entertainment, Canada, 1995.

Pollock. Dir. Ed Harris, Prod. Sony Pictures Classics, USA, 2000.

The Power and the Glory. Dir. William K. Howard, Prod. Fox Film Corporation, USA, 1933.

Pretty Boy Floyd. Dir. Herbert J. Leder, Prod. Le-Sac Productions, USA, 1960.

Pride & Prejudice. Dir. Joe Wright, Prod. StudioCanal/Working Title Films, UK, 2005.

Primary Colors. Dir. Mike Nichols, Prod. Universal, USA, 1998.

Public Enemies. Dir. Michael Mann, Prod. Universal Pictures, USA, 2009.

The Public Enemy. Dir. William A. Wellman, Prod. Warner Bros., USA, 1931.

The Queen. Dir. Stephen Frears, Prod. Miramax Films/Pathé Pictures/20th Century Fox, France/Italy/UK, 2006.

Rachel Getting Married. Dir. Jonathan Demme, Prod. Sony Pictures Classics, USA, 2008.

Radio Bikini. Dir. Robert Stone, Prod. Crossroads/Robert Stone Productions, USA, 1988.

A Rage in Harlem. Dir. Bill Duke, Prod. Miramax Films, USA, 1991.

Rashomon. Dir. Akira Kurosawa, Prod. Daiei, Japan, 1950.

Ray. Dir. Taylor Hackford, Prod. Universal Studios, USA, 2004.

Reds. Dir. Warren Beatty, Prod. Barclays Mercantile Industrial Finance/JRS Productions, USA, 1981.

Repentance/Monanieba. Dir. Tengiz Abuladze, Prod. Qartuli Telepilmi/Sovexportfilm, Georgia/Soviet Union, 1984.

The Return of Martin Guerre/Le Retour de Martin Guerre. Dir. Daniel Vigne, Prod. Dussault/FR 3/SFP, France, 1982.

Road to Perdition. Dir. Sam Mendes, Prod. DreamWorks/20th Century Fox, USA, 2002.

Robbery Homicide Division. Prod. CBS, USA, 2002-03.

The Robe. Dir. Henry Koster, Prod. 20th Century Fox, USA, 1953.

Robin Hood. Dir. Ridley Scott, Prod. Universal Pictures/Imagine Entertainment/Relativity Media/Scott Free Productions, USA/UK, 2010.

The Runaways. Dir. Floria Sigismondi, Prod. Apparition, USA, 2010.

Russian Ark. Dir. Alexander Sokurov, Prod. Seville Pictures, Canada/Finland/Germany/ Russia, 2002.

Ruthless. Dir. Edgar G. Ulmer, Prod. Eagle-Lion Films, USA, 1948.

Sans soleil. Dir. Chris Marker, Prod. Argos Films, France, 1983.

Saturday Night Live. Episode 693. Prod. NBC, USA, aired 29/01/11.

Saving Private Ryan. Dir. Steven Spielberg, Prod. DreamWorks SKG/Paramount Pictures/Amblin Entertainment, USA, 1998.

Scarface. Dir. Howard Hawks, Prod. United Artists, USA, 1932.

Schindler's List. Dir. Steven Spielberg, Prod. Universal Pictures/Amblin Entertainment, USA, 1993.

The Searchers. Dir. John Ford, Prod. Warner Bros., USA, 1956.

Selena. Dir. Gregory Nava, Prod. Warner Bros., USA, 1997.

Sergeant York. Dir. Howard Hawks, Prod. Warner Bros., USA, 1941.

Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll. Dir. Mat Whitecross, Prod. DJ Films/Tribeca Film, UK, 2010.

Side by Side. Dir. Christopher Kenneally, Prod. Company Films, USA, 2012.

Side Effects. Dir. Steven Soderbergh, Prod. Endgame Entertainment, USA, 2013.

The Simpsons. Episode 'Loan-a Lisa'. Dir. Matthew Faughnan, Prod. 20th Century Fox, USA, Aired 03/10/10.

Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow. Dir. Kerry Conran, Prod. Paramount Pictures, USA, 2004.

The Social Network. Dir. David Fincher, Prod. Columbia Pictures, USA, 2010.

Some Like It Hot. Dir. Billy Wilder, Prod. The Mirisch Corporation, USA, 1959.

Southland Tales. Dir. Richard Kelly, Prod. Destination Films/Samuel Goldwyn Films/Universal/Wild Bunch, France/Germany/USA, 2006.

The Special Relationship. Dir. Richard Loncraine, Prod. BBC/HBO, UK/USA, 2010.

The St. Valentine's Day Massacre. Dir. Roger Corman, Prod. 20th Century Fox, USA, 1967.

A Star Is Born. Dir. William A. Wellman, Prod. Selznick International Pictures/United Artists, USA, 1937.

The Story of Alexander Graham Bell. Dir. Irving Cummings, Prod. 20th Century Fox, USA, 1939.

The Story of Louis Pasteur. Dir. William Dieterle, Prod. Warner Bros., USA, 1936.

The Ten Commandments. Dir. Cecil B. DeMille, Prod. Paramount Pictures, USA, 1956.

There Will Be Blood. Dir. Paul Thomas Anderson, Prod. Miramax Films/Paramount Vantage, USA, 2007.

Thief. Dir. Michael Mann, Prod. United Artists, USA, 1981.

The Thin Blue Line. Dir. Errol Morris, Prod. Miramax Films, USA, 1988.

The Thin Red Line. Dir. Terrence Malick, Prod. 20th Century Fox, USA, 1998.

Thirteen Days. Dir. Roger Donaldson, Prod. Tig Productions, USA, 2000.

Thirty Two Short Films About Glenn Gould. Dir. François Girard, Prod. The Samuel Goldwyn Company, Canada/Finland/ Netherlands/Portugal, 1993.

Titanic. Dir. James Cameron, Prod. Paramount Pictures/20th Century Fox, USA, 1997.

To the Wonder. Dir. Terrence Malick, Prod. Brothers K Productions/Redbud Pictures, USA, 2013.

Touching the Void. Dir. Kevin MacDonald, Prod. IFC/Pathé, UK, 2003.

Traffic. Dir. Steven Soderbergh, Prod. USA Films, USA, 2000.

The Tree of Life. Dir. Terrence Malick, Prod. Fox Searchlight Pictures, USA, 2011.

Trigger Happy/Mad Dog Time. Dir. Larry Bishop, Prod. United Artists, USA, 1996.

Troy. Dir. Wolfgang Petersen, Prod. Warner Bros., Malta/UK/USA, 2004.

Tucker: The Man and His Dream. Dir. Francis Ford Coppola, Prod. Paramount Pictures, USA, 1988.

12 Years a Slave. Dir. Steve McQueen, Prod. Plan B Entertainment/New Regency Pictures/Regency Enterprises, USA, 2013.

28 Days Later. Dir. Danny Boyle, Prod. DNA Films/British Film Council, UK, 2002.

United 93. Dir. Paul Greengrass, Prod. StudioCanal/Working Title/SKE Entertainment, USA/UK/France, 2006.

United Red Army/Jitsuroku Rengo Sekigun: Asama sanso e no michi. Dir. Kōji Wakamatsu, Prod. Wakamatsu Productions, Japan, 2007.

Unscripted. Prod. HBO, USA, 2005.

The Untouchables. Dir. Brian De Palma, Prod. Paramount Pictures, USA, 1987.

La Vie en Rose. Dir. Olivier Dahan, Prod. Picturehouse, France, 2007.

W. Dir. Oliver Stone, Prod. Onda Entertainment, USA/Australia/Hong Kong/Switzerland/China, 2008.

Walk the Line. Dir. James Mangold, Prod. 20th Century Fox, USA, 2005.

Walker. Dir. Alex Cox, Prod. In-Cine Compañía Industrial Cinematográfica/Northern/Walker Films Limited, USA/Mexico/Spain, 1987.

White Heat. Dir. Raoul Walsh, Prod. Warner Bros., USA, 1949.

You Only Live Once. Dir. Fritz Lang, Prod. United Artists, USA, 1937.

Young Mr. Lincoln. Dir. John Ford, Prod. Cosmopolitan Productions, USA, 1939.

Zero Dark Thirty. Dir. Kathryn Bigelow, Prod. Columbia Pictures/Annapurna Pictures/First Light Production, USA, 2012.

Zodiac. Dir. David Fincher, Prod. Paramount Pictures/Warner Bros., USA, 2007.

Fig. 1.1

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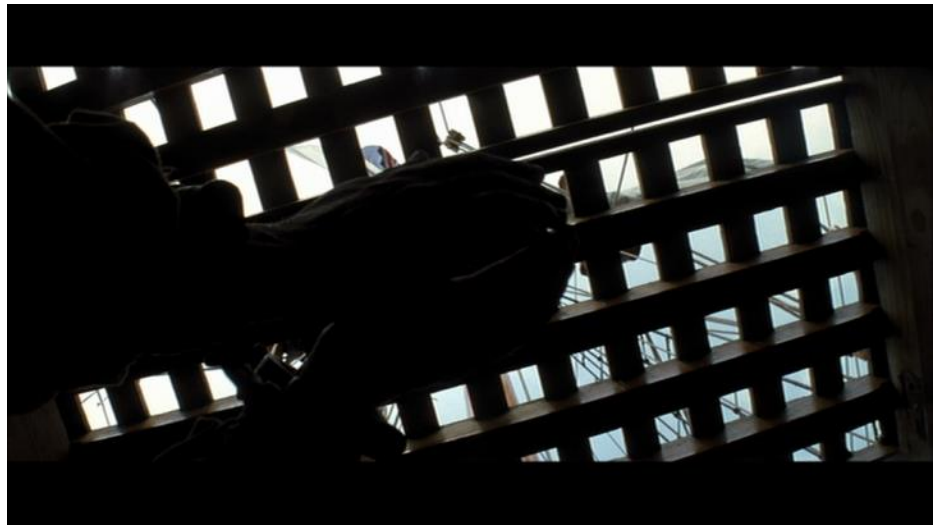
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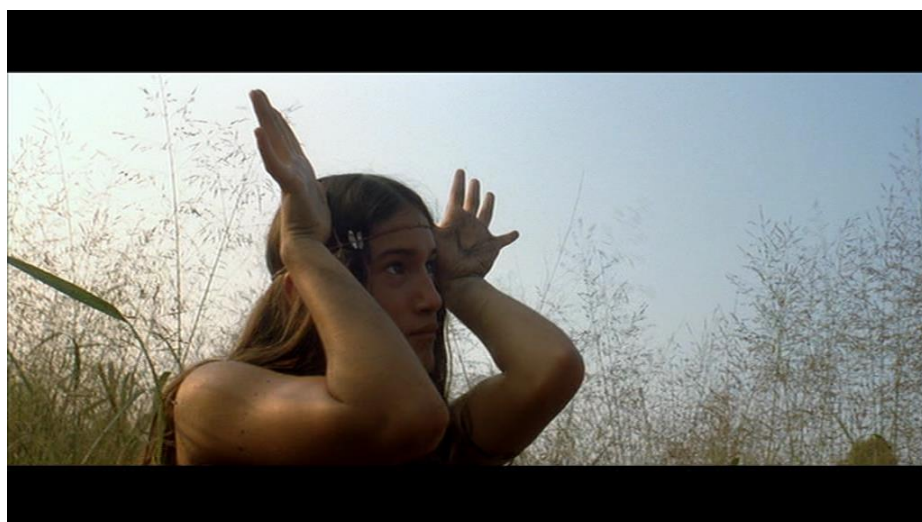

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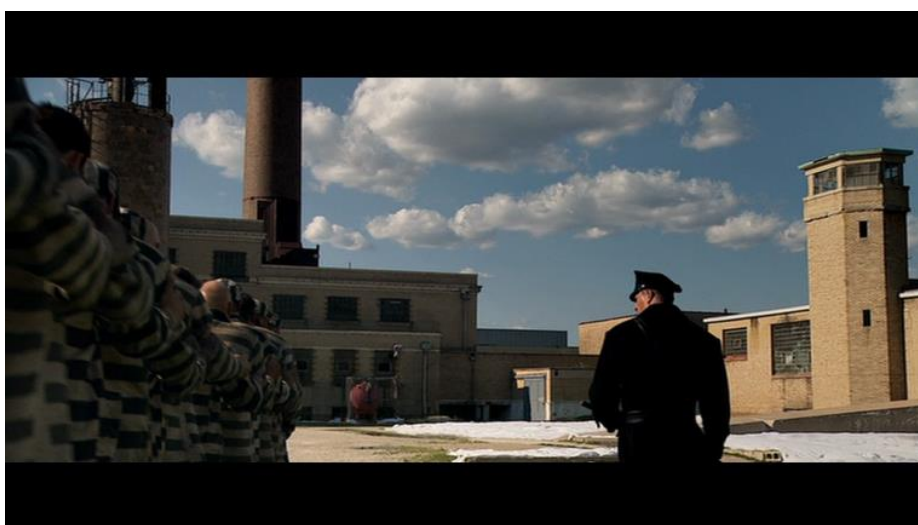
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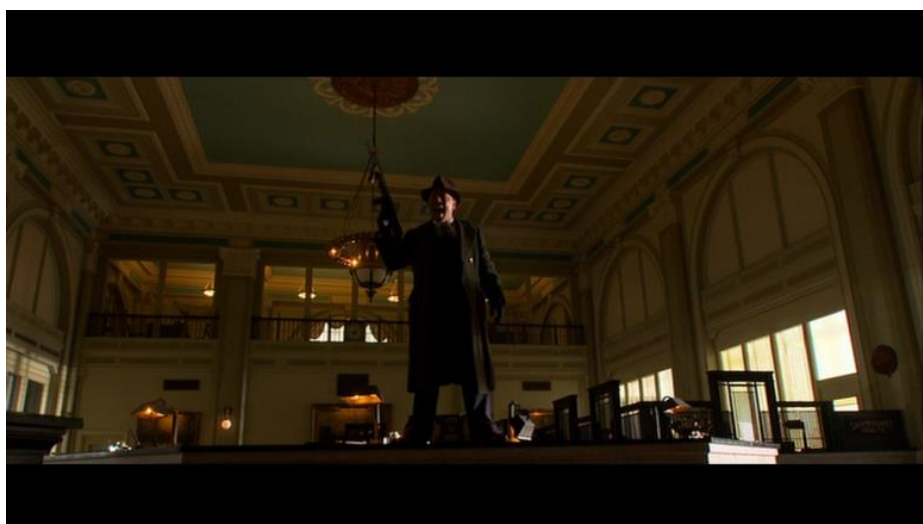
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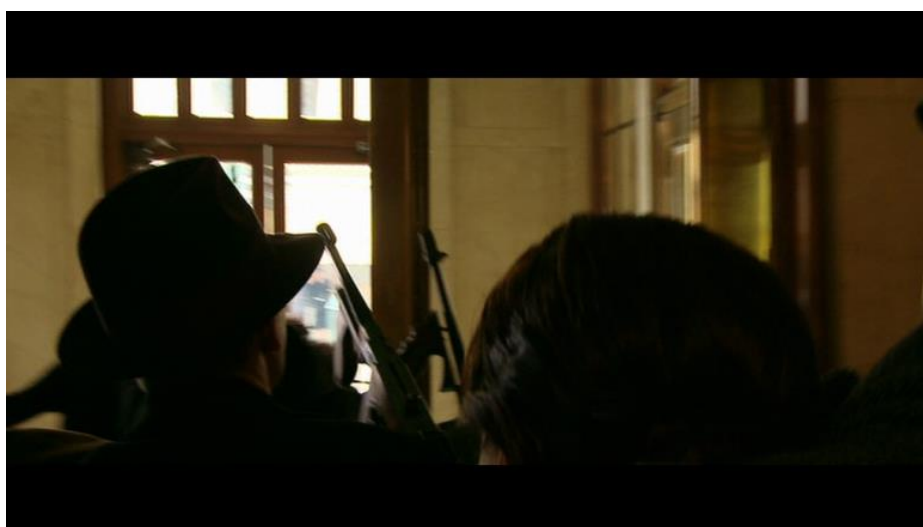
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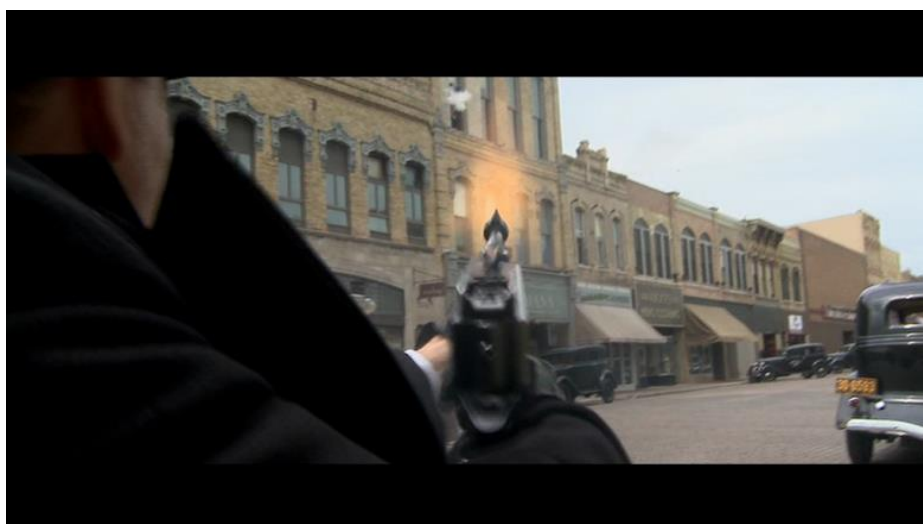
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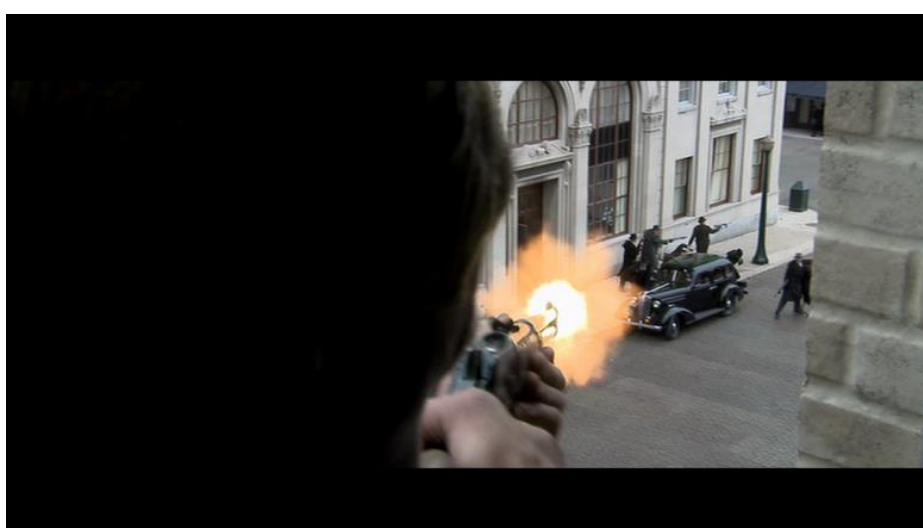
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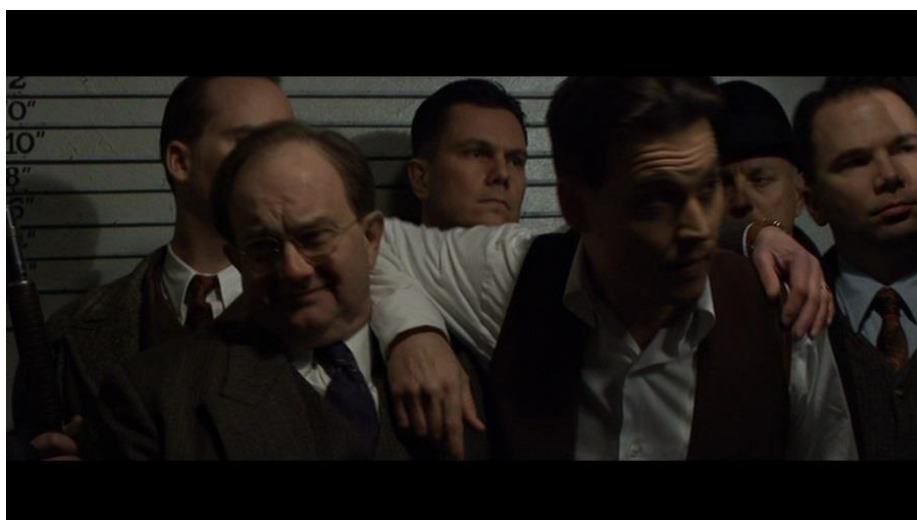
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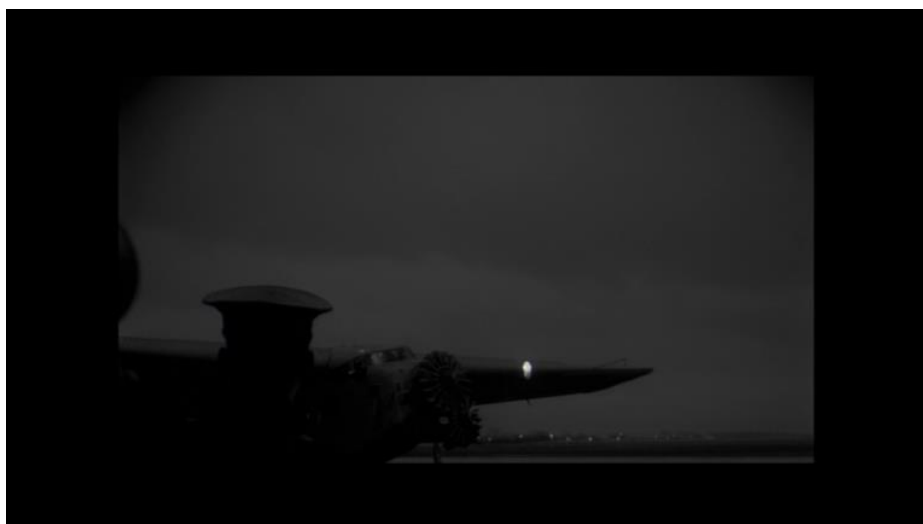
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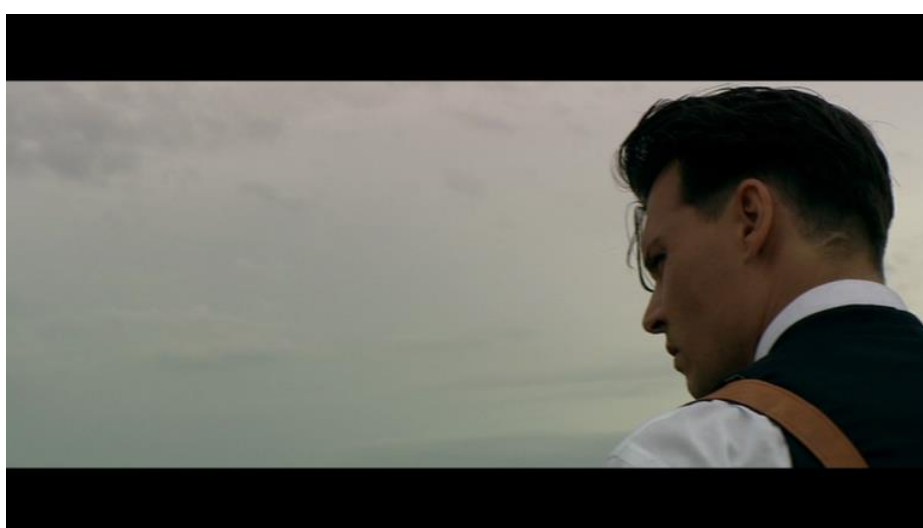
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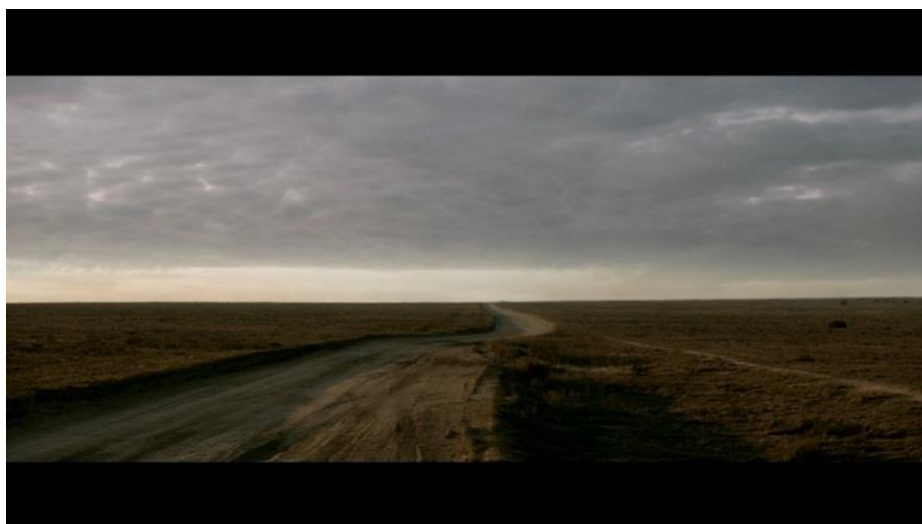
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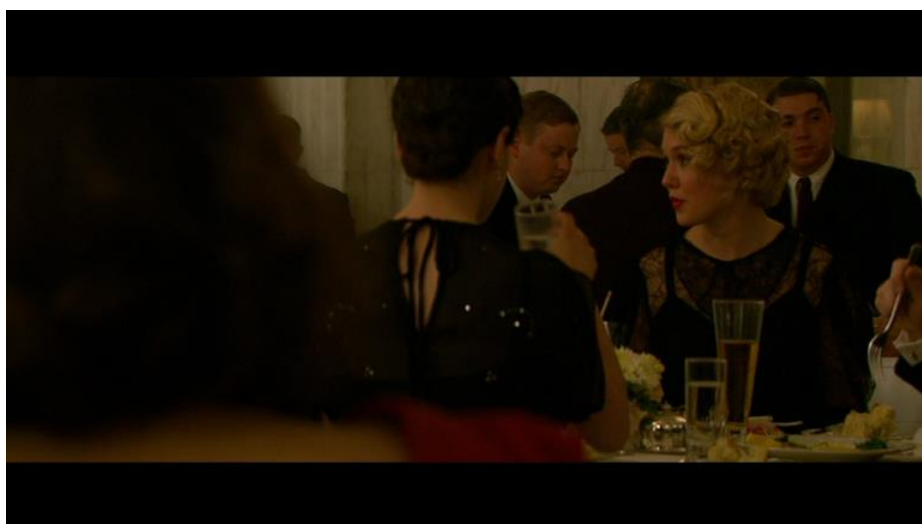
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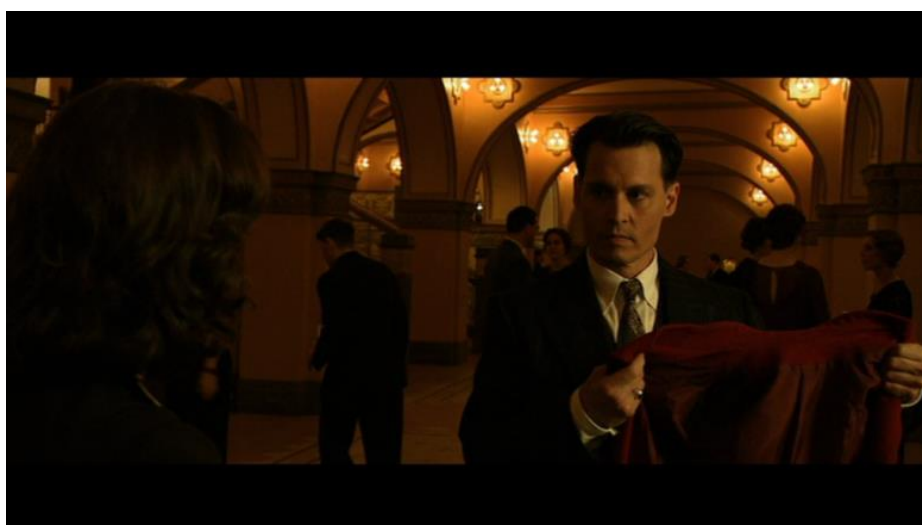
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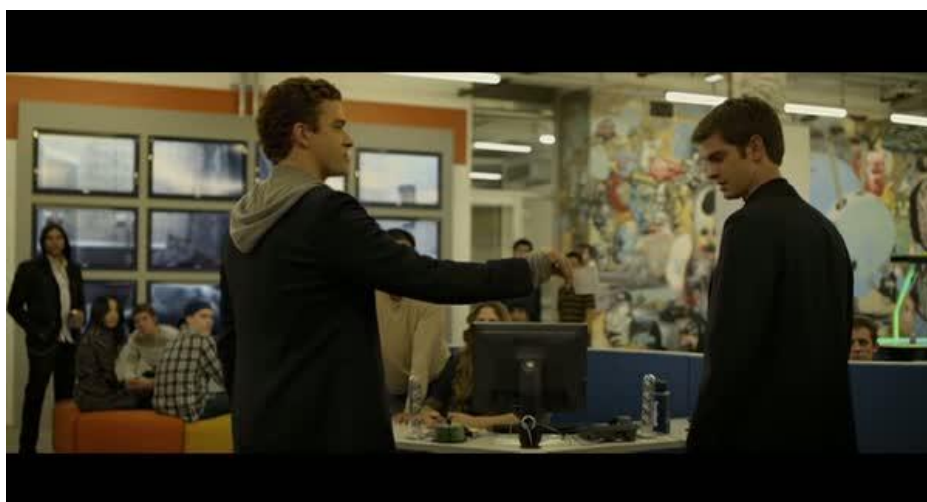Fig. 2.29

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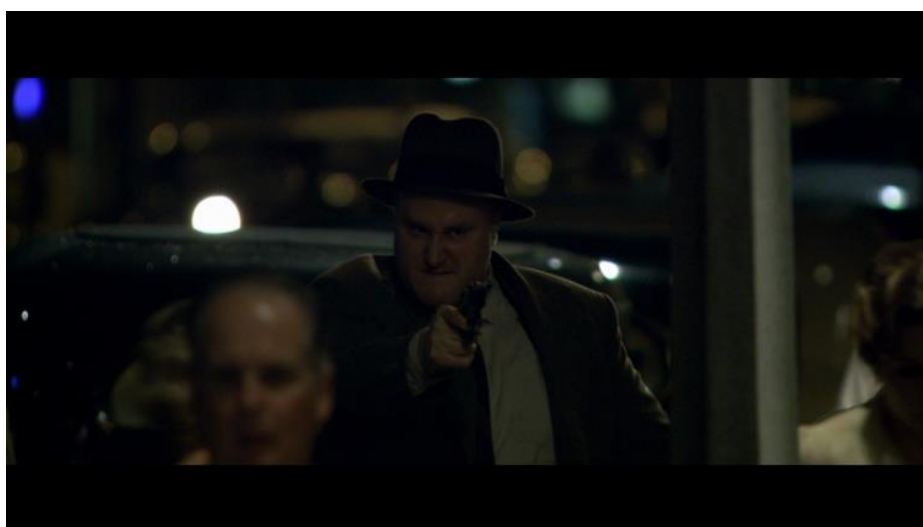
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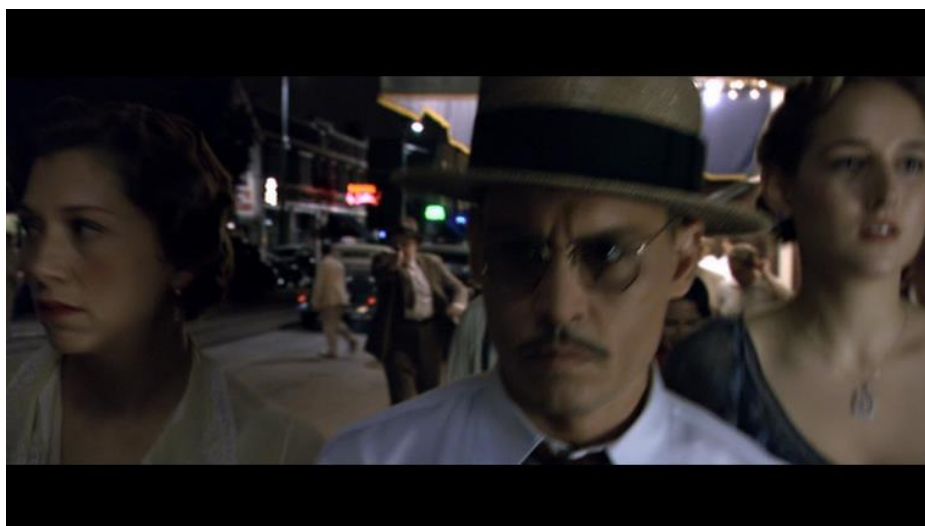
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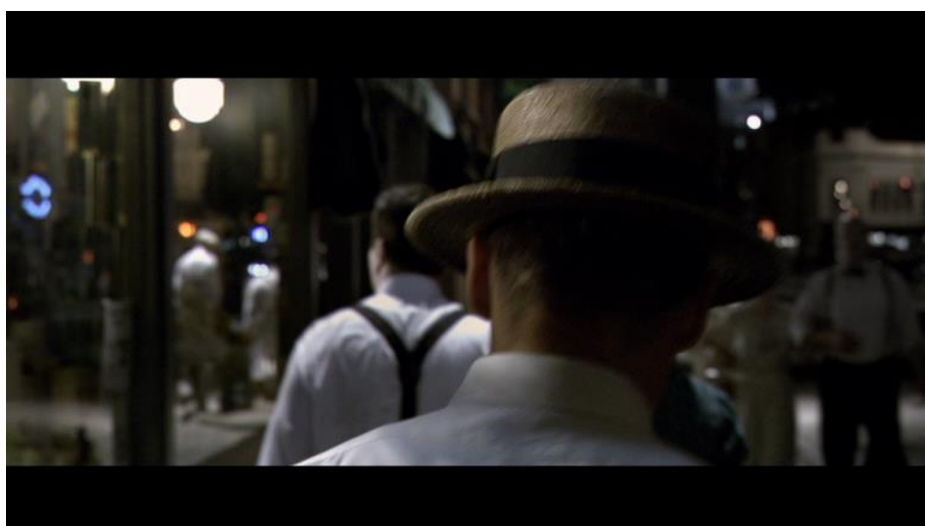
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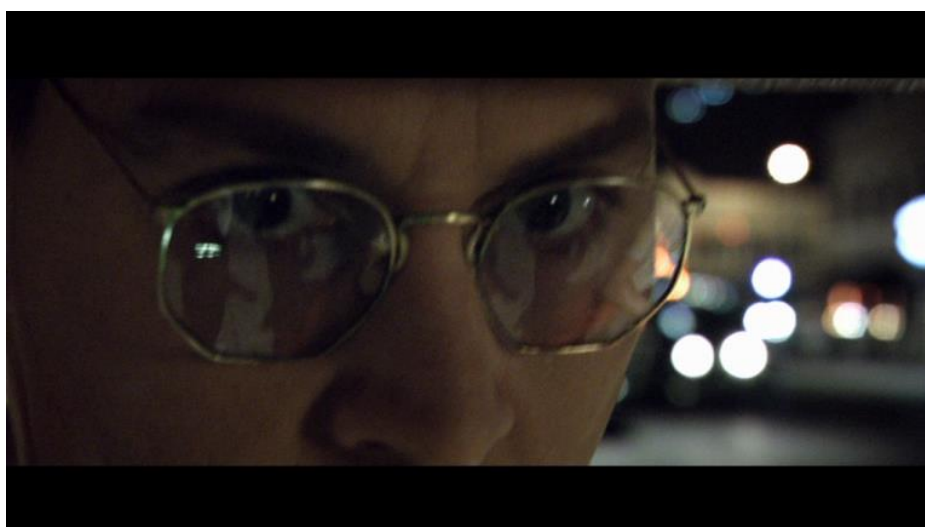
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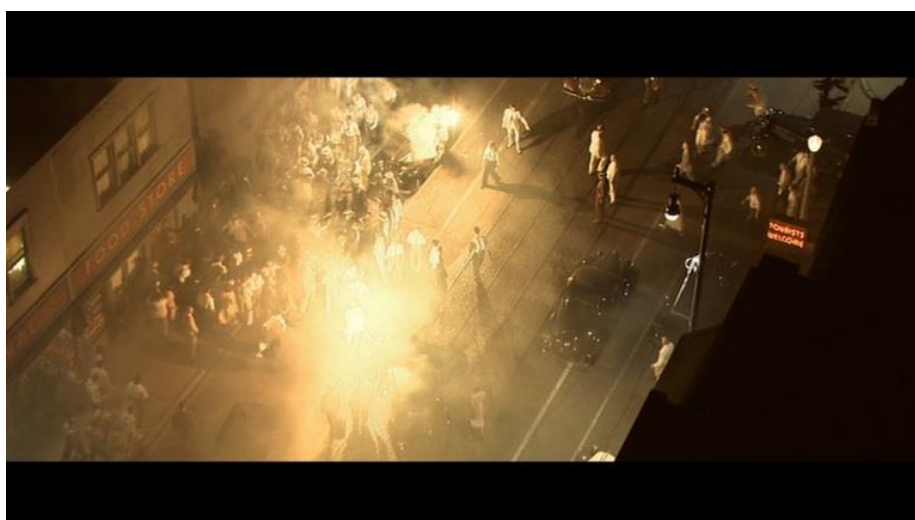
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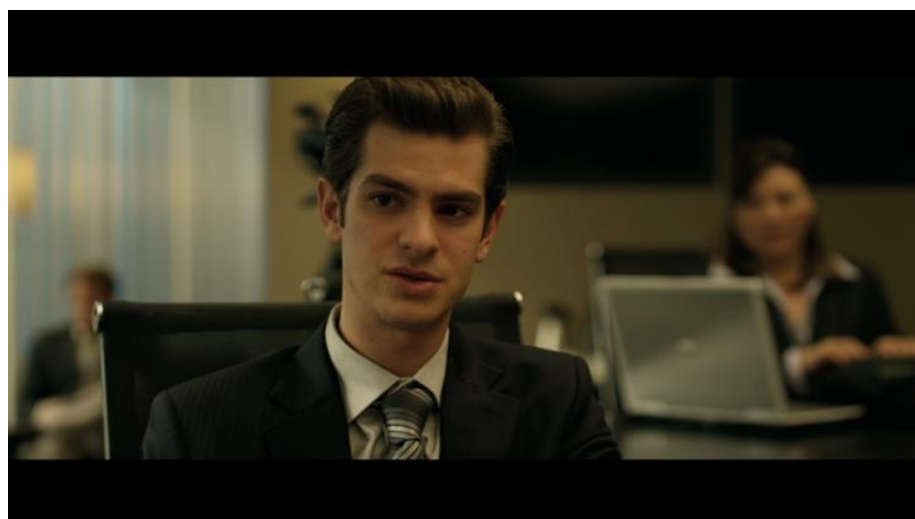
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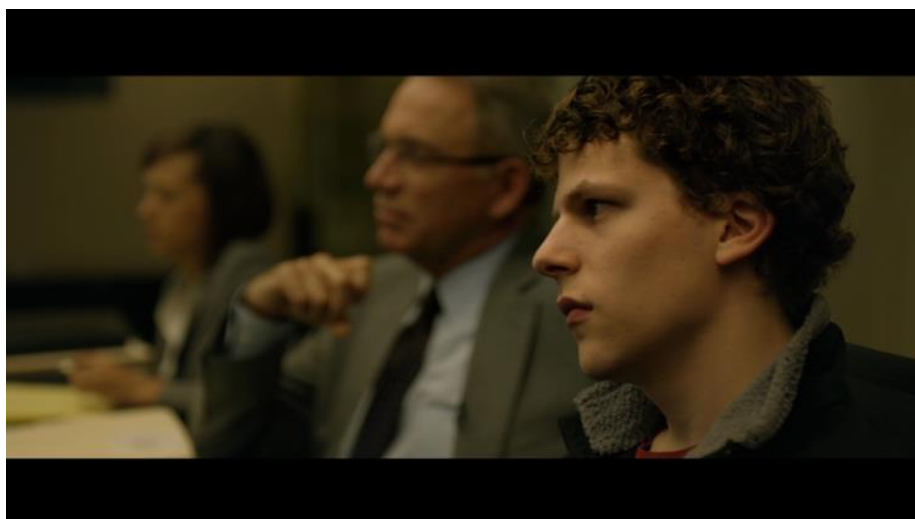
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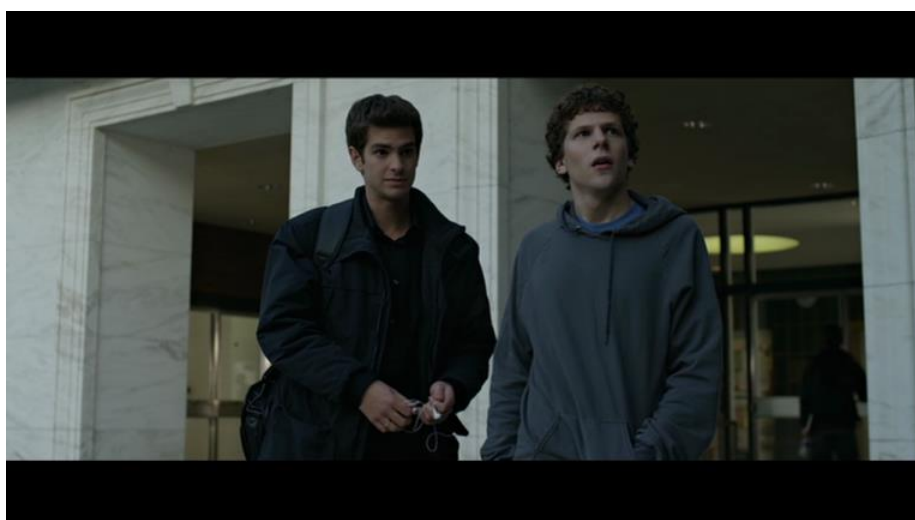
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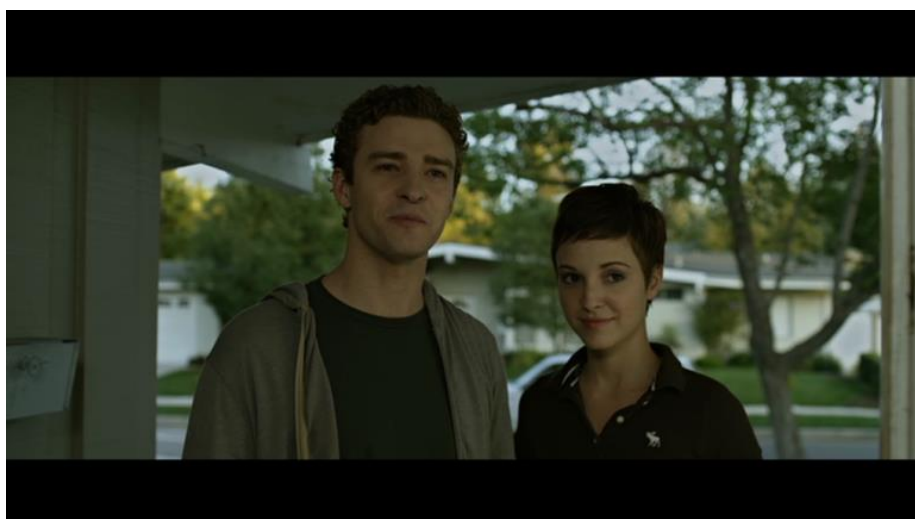
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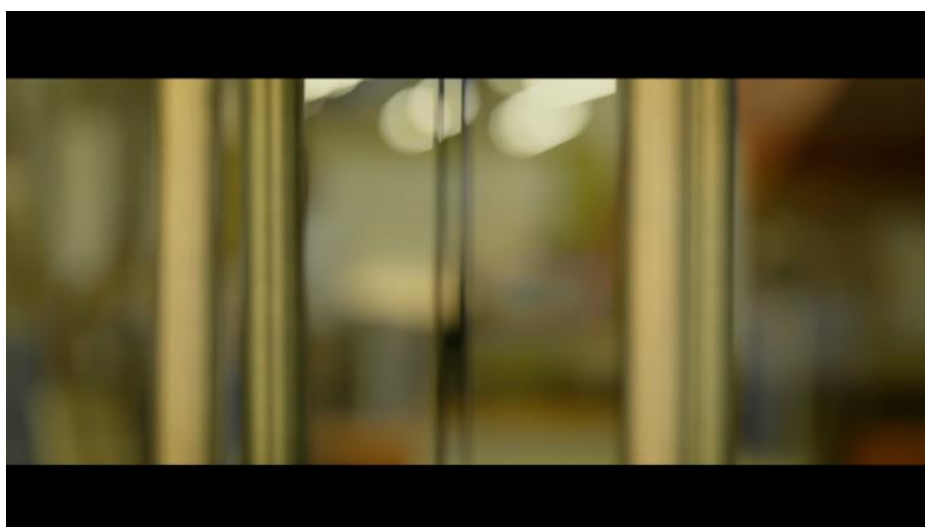
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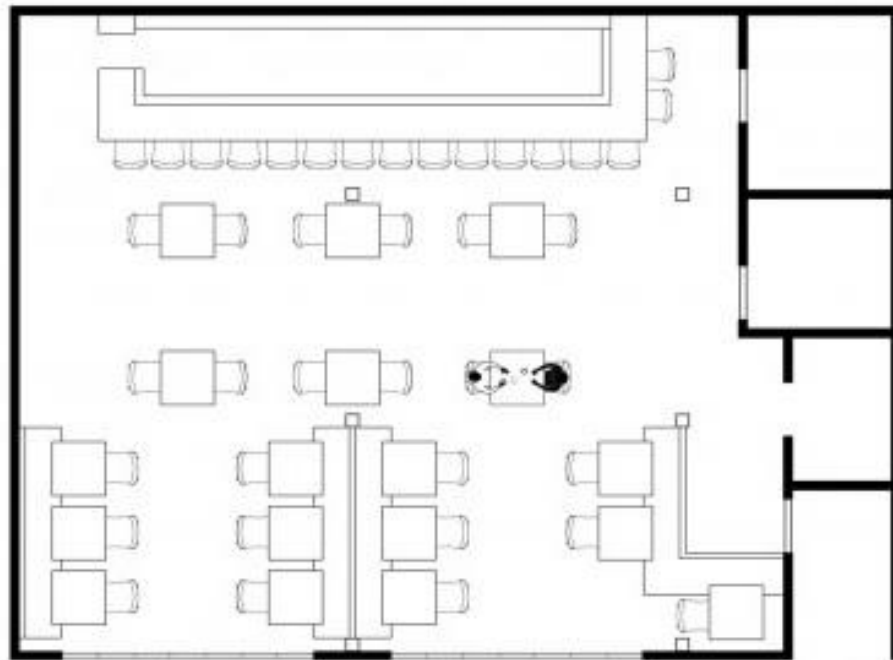
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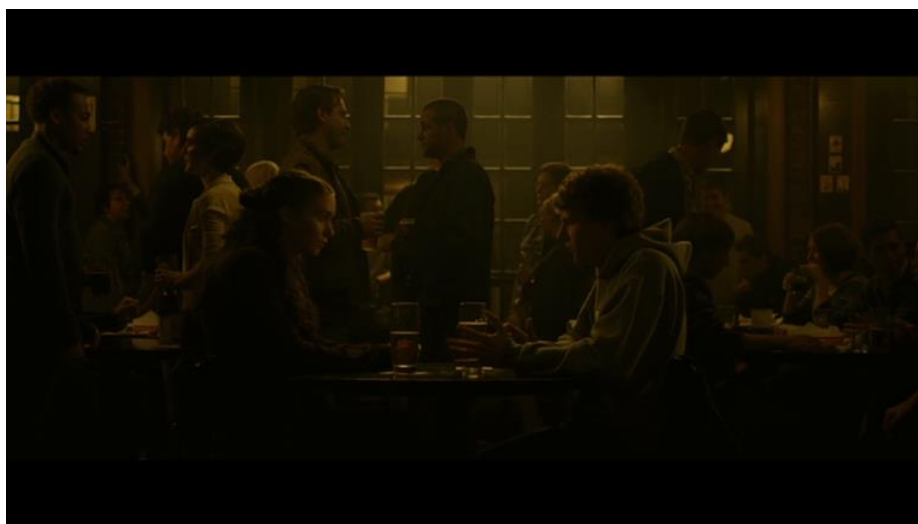
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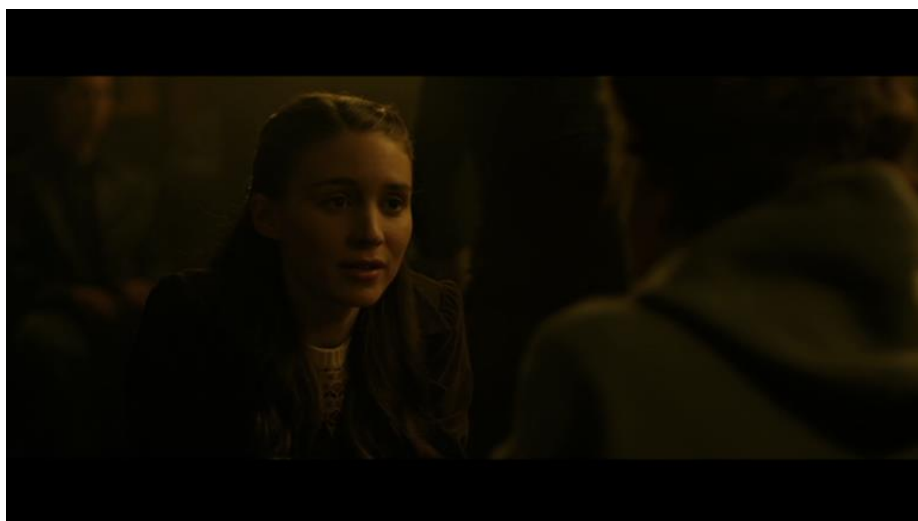
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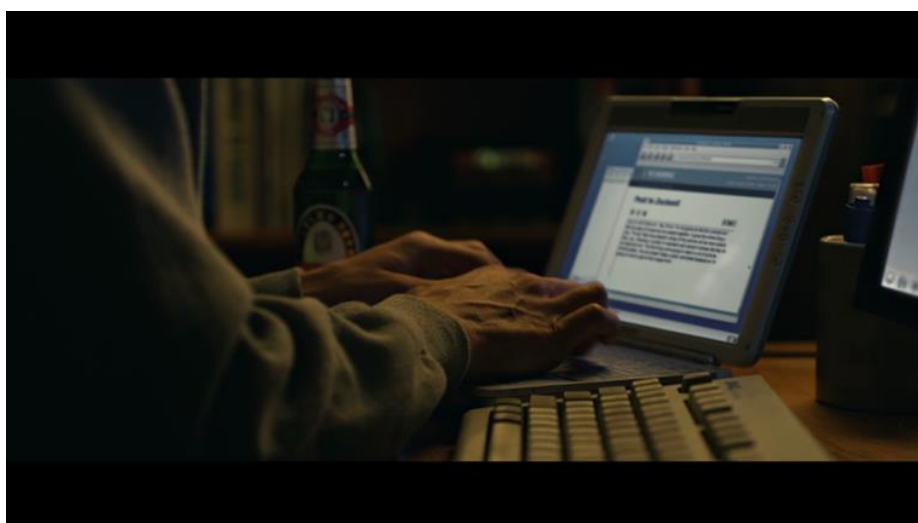
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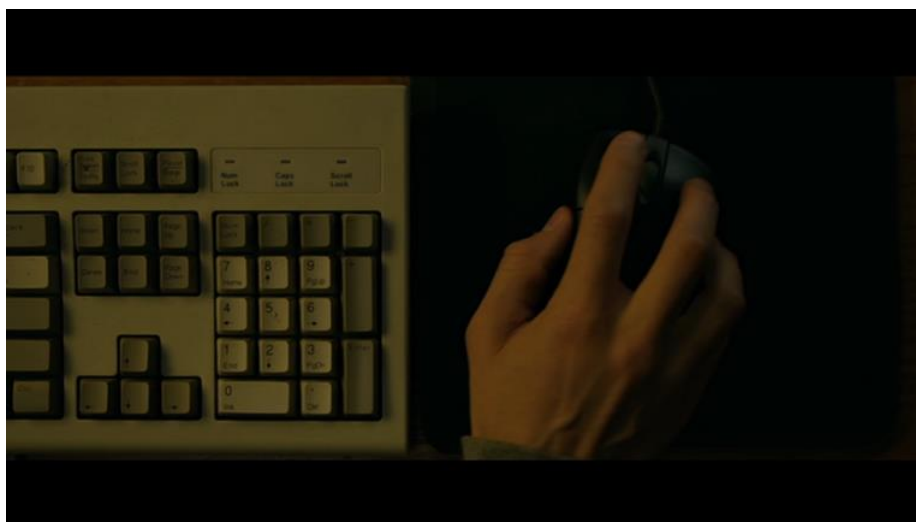
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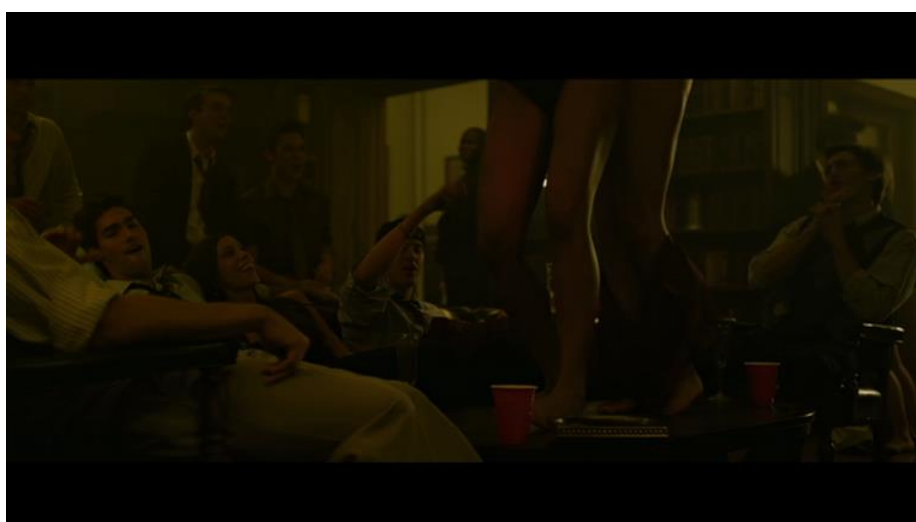
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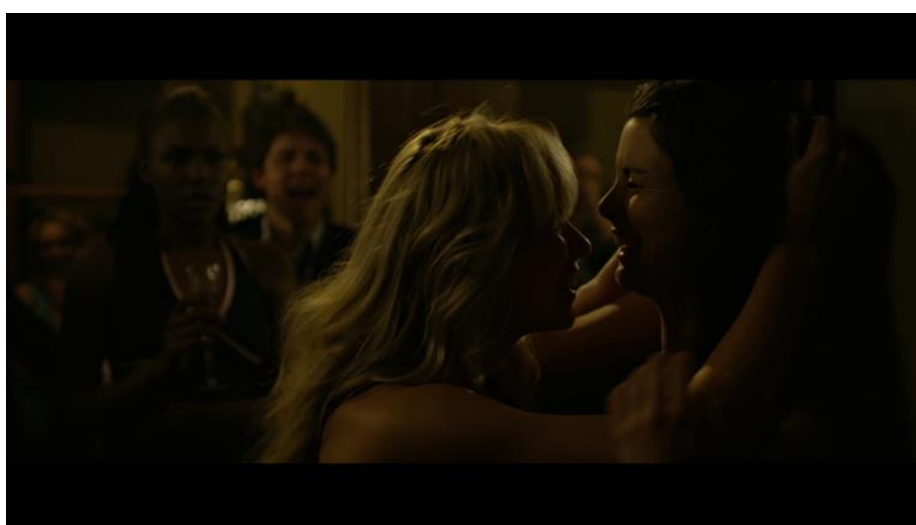
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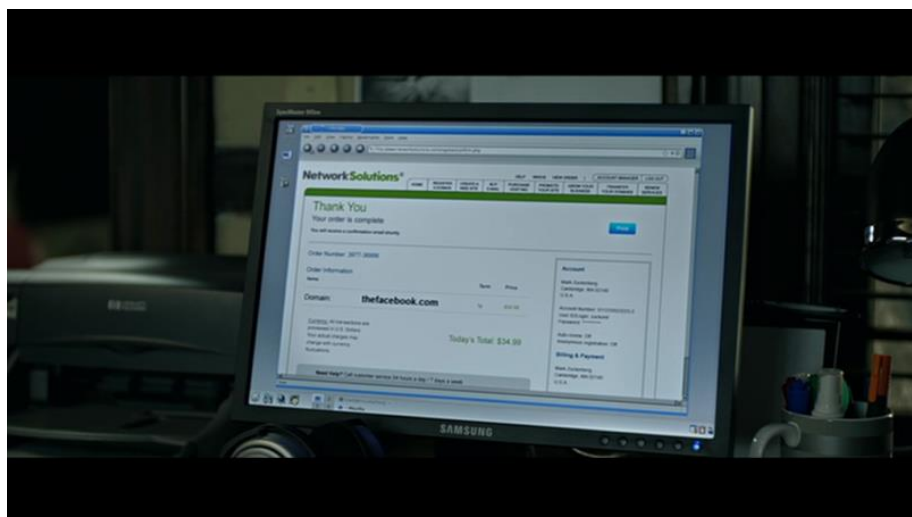
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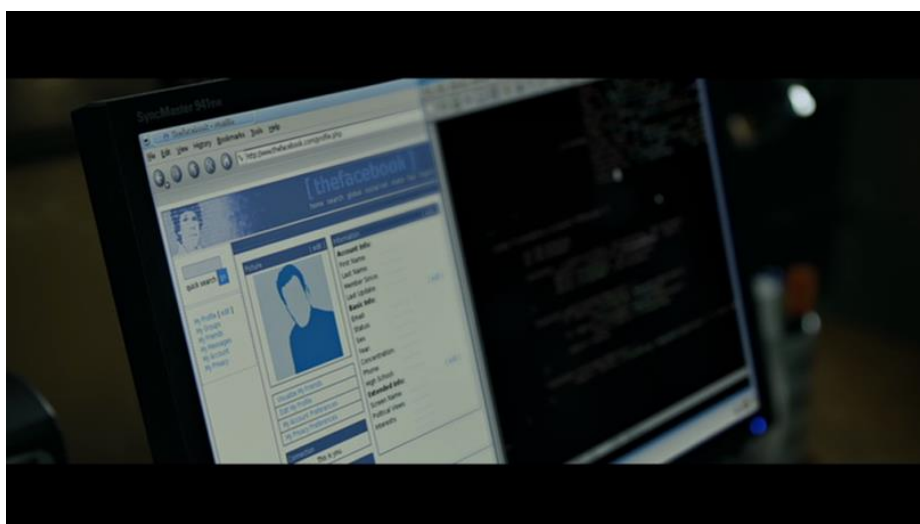
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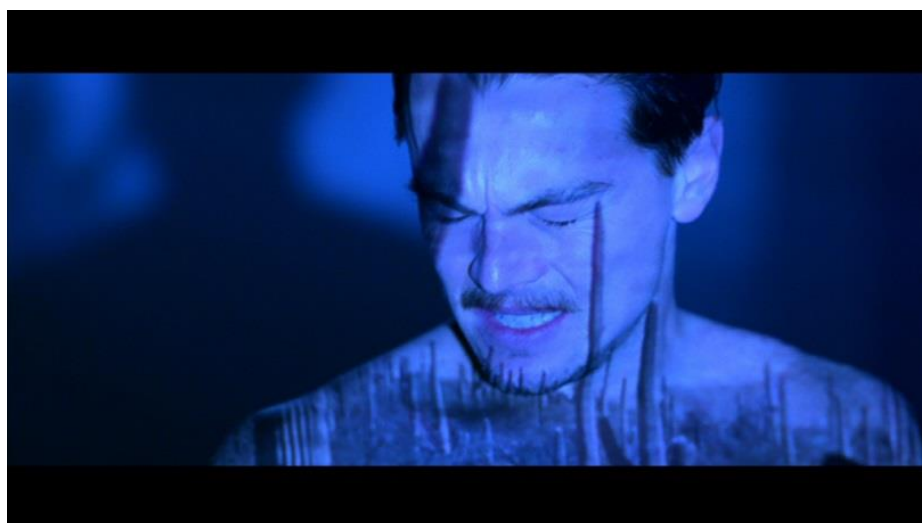
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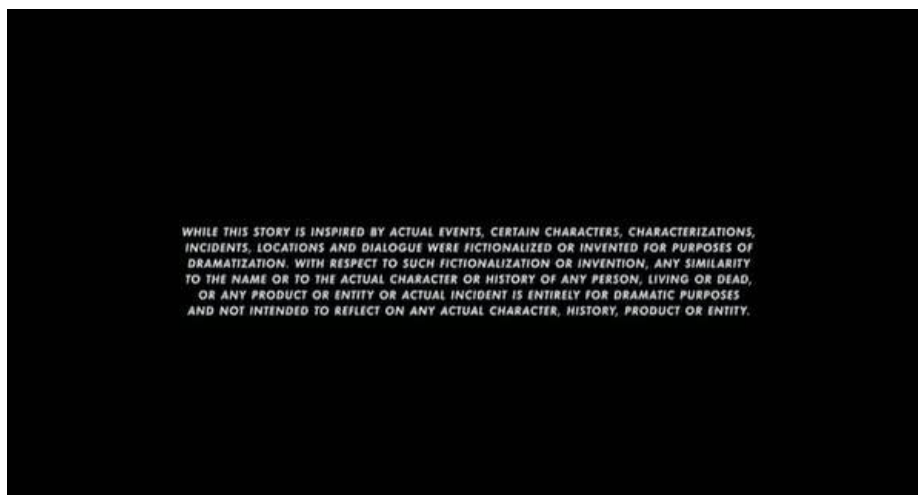
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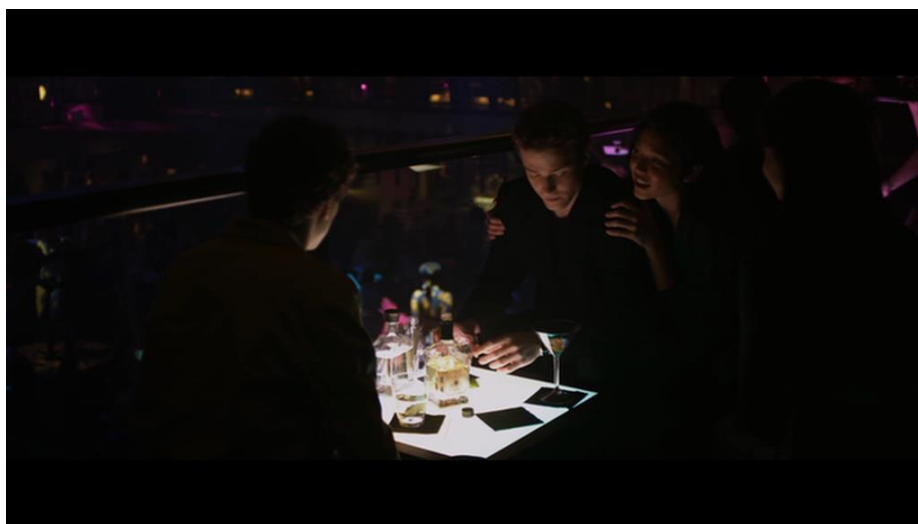Fig. 3.27

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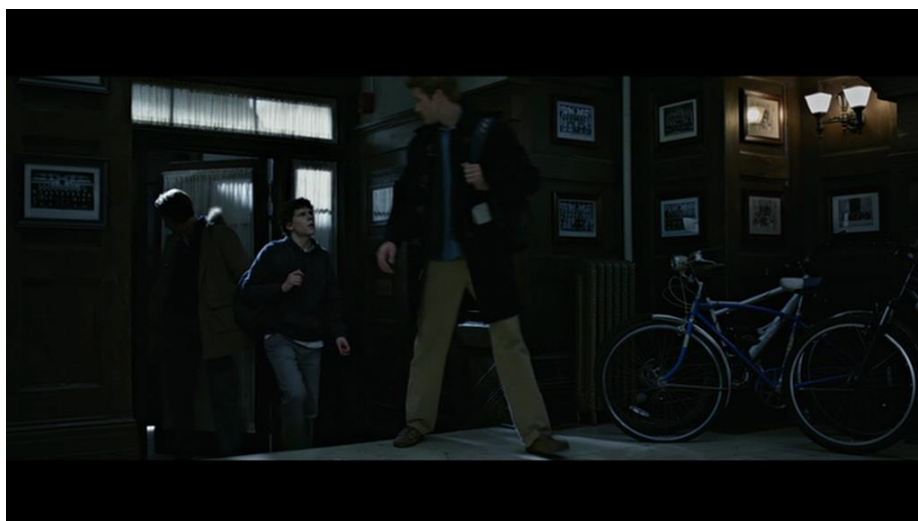
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